Charlton SPOTLIGHT

Exploring the History of the Charlton Comics Group

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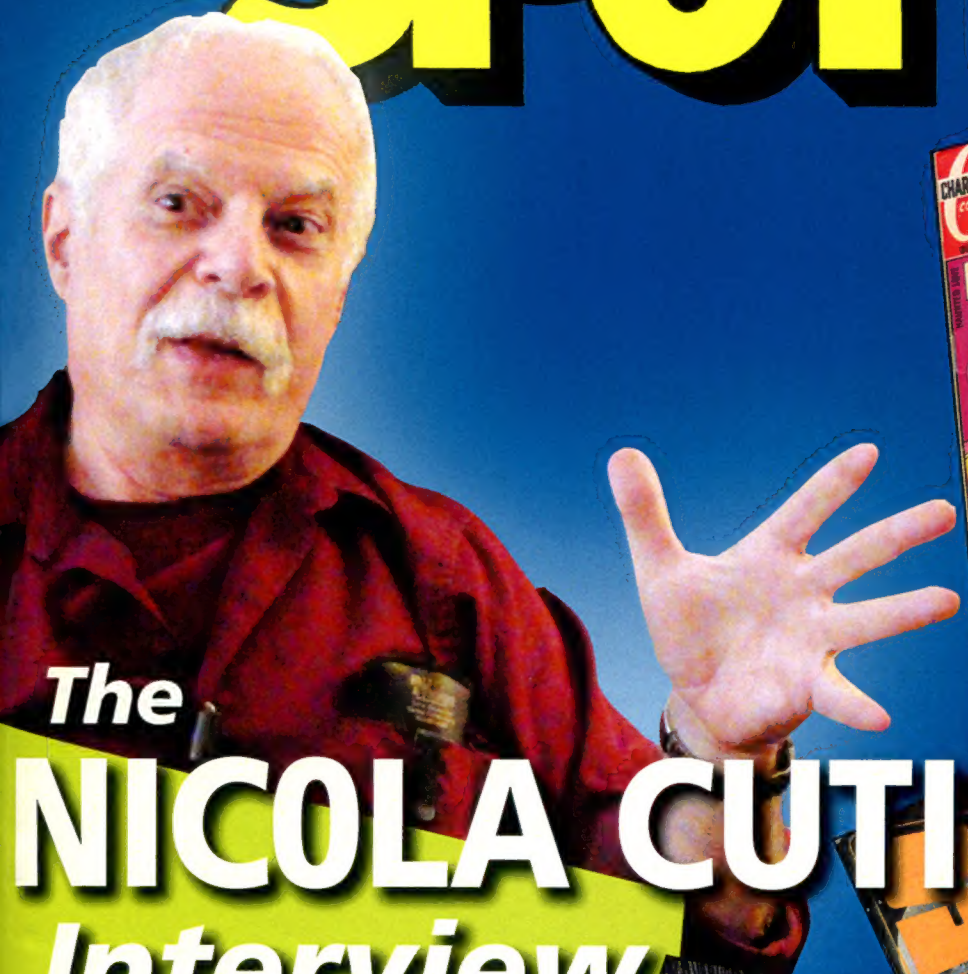

The NICOLA CUTI Interview

TOM SUTTON
new Doomsday+1 *story*

GEORGE WILDMAN
Charlton Puzzle Page

PAUL KUPPERBERG
Scary Charlton Tales

RON FRANTZ
and ALEX TOTH!

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the WEIRD kids™

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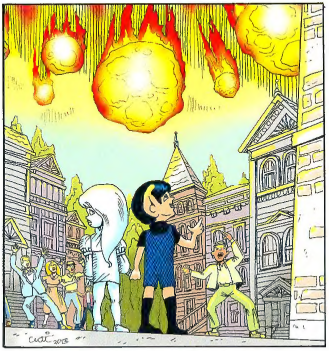
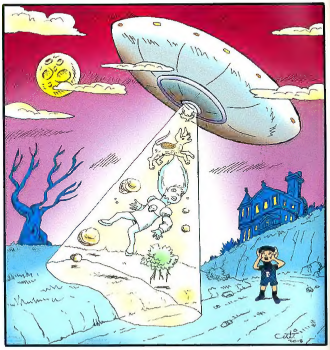


I LOVE A SPRING **SHOWER**.



WHEN THEY **RELEASE** YOU, WE NEED A DOZEN EGGS AND A QUART OF MILK.

SEE, ELENORA, MR.LACASANO HAS THE **FRESHEST** FISH IN TOWN.

THANKS, ELLIOT, BUT WE **DO** HAVE MATCHES.

Charlton SPOTLIGHT

No. 8 • FALL–WINTER 2013–2014

Exploring the History of the Charlton Comics Group

FRONT COVER

The Master . . .
Nicola Cuti
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BACK COVER

***Doomsday+1* #13 unpublished cover by Tom Sutton**
Colors by Donnie Pitchford
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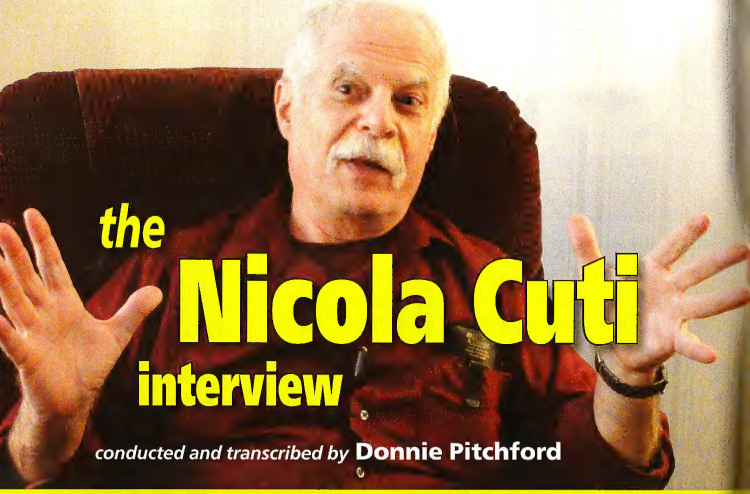


the Nicola Cuti interview

conducted and transcribed by **Donnie Pitchford**

IN THE DAYS before e-mail, there were "E-Mail," "Midnight Mails," "Phan-Mail," and more. Those were the "lettercols" or letter columns of Charlton comic books, where fans wrote as critics in what was usually a ruse to see one's name in print. Nicola Cuti presided over those pages in the early 1970s. That was only one of his myriad duties as right-hand man to managing editor George Wildman, who helmed Charlton's line during its greatest period of creative growth. "Nick," as he is known to friends, cocreated E-Man, scripted hundreds of comics, represented the company at conventions, and carried out the tedious day-to-day details of comics production taken for granted by readers. Nick agreed to sit for the following interview during a break in his activities as guest of honor at the September 2012 Popeye Picnic in Chester, Illinois.

"I'm always looking for different ways to tell stories."

DONNIE PITCHFORD: Nick, let's start from the beginning. When and where were you born?

NICOLA CUTI: I was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1944, on October 29, two days before Halloween. I asked my mother, "Couldn't you hold out another two days so I could be born on Halloween?" *[audience laughter]* She said, "No, there was no holding back." I was ready to pop out on the 29th of October. I grew up on the streets of Brooklyn. We had a lot of gang warfare. Luckily, not with knives and guns, most of it was with fists. "Fisks!" And anything else we could pick up. I lived in a predominantly Jewish apartment building. My worst enemies were the Italian kids. And I was Italian! When I started going to church, all of a sudden I saw myself surrounded by my enemies, and I said, "I'd either better get friendly with them, or I'm dead!" The way I became friends was by telling stories. I loved stories, and I would tell them stories that I had seen on television, or I made up stories of my own. Then we moved to Long Island, and I went into the service.

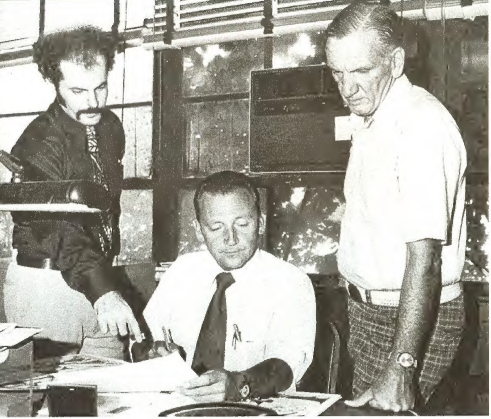
I didn't think my early artwork was slick enough for professional comics, so the way I used to do it was as a writer. I would get a lot of writing jobs and that's how I stayed in comics. The first story I ever had published was while I was in the military. I was an air policeman [USAF]. While I was on post one time, I was reading a *Creepy* comic, and I said, "I can write this stuff!" and I wrote a story called "Grub." I sent it in to Jim Warren at *Creepy* and he published it! From then on, I was just hooked. I went to conventions, and I kept sending in stories, and I kept getting more and more stories published and became a comic book person.

DONNIE: How did you get started at Charlton?

NICK: This goes back to how I met Wally Wood. I was at a convention and I picked up a Wally Wood portfolio he had printed. I was a huge, huge fan of his, since I was a little kid. I used to read the EC comics, and his stuff just blew me away. On the back was an address and a phone number, and I decided, "Ah, I'm gonna take a chance!" I called the phone number. I figured it was probably out of date, and no good, but all of a sudden this very quiet voice said, "Yes? Can I help you?" I says, "I'm trying to get ahold of Wally Wood," and the man said, "This is Wally Wood." So I says, "Oh! Mr. Wood, I'm an artist, and I'd like to bring down my portfolio." "Oh, sure! Come on down." I had the address, so I went down to the studio, and I showed him all my artwork. It wasn't professional enough for him to use, but he liked one character I had done, Moonchild. He said, "Do something with Moonchild, and I'll publish it in *witzend* magazine." Well, I did a big, full page of Moonchild, and I brought it down to him, and he liked it. He said, "If I still had *witzend*, I'd publish it." I said, "You don't have it anymore?" and he says, "No, I sold it to Bill Pearson." I'd never met Bill

Splash page of Nicola Cuti's first professionally published comics story, "Grub!", from ***Creepy*** #28, Aug. 1969. Art by Tom Sutton. Creepy TM & © 2013 New Comic Company LLC.

GRUB!
LORD! LOOK AT THE SIZE OF IT! IT'S AS LARGE AS A SMALL MOON! OR ARE WE GOING TO A SMALL MOON! IT SAYS SO!
WE'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH! NOW! GET A GROUP TOGETHER!
WHILE ON PATROL IN GALACTIC SECTOR SIGMA, THE CREW OF THE STAR SHIP LARK, UNDER THE COMMAND OF CAPTAIN GARON, HIS CREW ACROSS AN INTRUDER. LIKE THE SARDINE WHO BLUNDERS INTO A WHALE, THEY PRAY THE MONSTER IS SLEEPING.
WE'RE GOING TO BOARD THAT LEVIATHAN!
ART BY TOM SUTTON/SCRIPT BY NICOLA CUTI



Charlton Comics editorial staff, 1973: Assistant Editor Nicola Cuti, Managing Editor George Wildman, and chief writer Joe Gill. This photo and accompanying interview with Wildman originally appeared in ***Cartoonist PROfiles*** #20, Dec. 1973. Photo by Paula Hopper. © 2013 Estate of Jud Hurd.

Pearson, so I figured, all right, I'll show it to Bill Pearson. Well, Bill hated Moonchild. He said, "No, I'm not publishing it in my magazine." But we started talking, and we became friends. Bill and I, to this day, are close friends.

When I bumped into Woody at a convention, I asked him if he needed an assistant. He said he did, and we lived not far from one other, so we used to go over to each other's house. He lived in Woodmere and I lived in Valley Stream. Finally Woody said, "This is not working out. See if you can find a studio for us." I found a little studio on Rockaway Boulevard in Valley Stream, which is right between both our houses. He would "X" in different areas and I would ink them in black. Jack Abel and Syd Shores came in as partners. We worked on the strips *Cannon* and *Sally Forth*. I loved working on the strips. It was great. I even wrote a few of the stories. We also worked on some assignments from Jim Warren, *Creepy* and *Eerie* magazines. But the only thing is, I wasn't getting much money. Woody wasn't getting a huge amount of money, and whatever was left, I got, as his assistant, and it was like about 20 bucks a week, and I couldn't live on 20 bucks a week. So then an artist who lived in the area by the name of Tony Tallarico came into the studio. He told me, "Nick, they're looking for an assistant editor over at Charlton." George Wildman had just become editor, taking over from Sal Gentile. He said, "Why don't you apply there?" And I said, "Yeah! (*chuckles*) No problem!" A funny story: I was supposed to go into New York City to be interviewed by George, and I arrived there, and I had half an hour to drive something like four blocks. Well, the traffic was so packed that I was driving at a rate of half an hour for one block. So I wound up being something like two hours late for my interview. And I thought, "George can't possibly be waiting for me." I went there anyway. Sure enough, he was waiting there! I apologized and told him about the traffic jam, and he says, "That's what I figured. No problem, don't even think about it." He interviewed me and hired me for the job, and that's how I became assistant editor at Charlton.

DONNIE: What was the Charlton plant like in Derby, Connecticut?

NICK: It was a red brick building, and the offices were divided by these low fences, or cubicles, but they weren't the big cubicles you see now in offices. They were just these low wooden divisions. I was put right next to Joe Gill. George had his own little area, and Joe was furiously typing away at his typewriter almost all the time. At first, Joe and I did not hit it off. I saw how he was kind of resentful of me, like, "Who is this kid? Is he going to be good to me, because he's the assistant editor?" I was in charge of sending out assignments, although the writing assignments, Joe did them all. And I was a little resentful of the fact that here's this old-timer, typing away at his typewriter, and he wrote all the stories. I was a writer, and I wanted to write some of the stories, and I thought, how can I do it without stepping on his feet? Finally, I asked George if it would be okay if I wrote a few stories, and then we checked with Joe, and Joe said, "Yeah, let the kid go." I wrote a few of the stories for the ghost books, and even a few romance stories, and westerns, and war, and little by little, Joe and I became friends. We went out camping together, and we used to go to bars together, and I learned to really, really like and respect Joe as both a writer and as a person.

DONNIE: There's a story you told me about the real ice-breaker.

NICK: Charlton had all their books bound in hardcover, and I had a few of the bound volumes on my desk. I opened up one, and I said, "Oh my God! I read this when I was a kid!" It was a science fiction story. I said, "I loved it! This is one of the stories that made me decide to be a writer!" I was showing it to Joe. Joe looked up at me and said, "I wrote that story." And from there on in, we were good buddies, because he knew that I respected his stories, and I got new respect for Joe.

DONNIE: You've described the office where you worked in comics. What about the general layout of the plant?

NICK: The offices were on the main floor. Below, in the basement, was the plant, where they had the huge presses. They were four-color presses. That's black, yellow, red, and blue. Then they had the photography area. I remember the fellow who ran it, a young kid named Bobby. I would take the pages after the artwork was done downstairs to Bobby and he would shoot the pages, and then they'd be turned into negatives that would be turned into plates. And those plates were the ones that were printed. They were brought

to the presses and locked in, and that's the black-and-white plates. Now, the color division was also at Charlton. That was a group of ladies who were the color separators. I'm not sure if anyone knows how color separating works, but what they would do is they would have these plastic covers that would fit over the black-and-white artwork. Say they wanted to do Popeye's blue trousers. They would block out, on the transparency, the area that was supposed to be blue, and they'd mark it on the top, "blue." Everything on that transparency was going to be blue. And then, if they wanted flesh tones, well, flesh tones were lighter. Those were usually a combination of reds and yellows. So they would have to have a red transparency and then a yellow transparency and that would give you the flesh tones. These ladies did it all by hand. You'd have a stack of color transparencies that were used for the separations. Then all of these were made into plates that were put on the different presses. A page of comics would run through the black press, where all the line work was printed, then the yellow press, where all the yellow colors were printed, then the red press, and then the blue press. When you got finished, you had a page of comics. Then that would go to the cutter, and it was then bound. Charlton was a complete publishing outfit. And they had trucks, which did the deliveries to the different distributors.

DONNIE: Did you live in Derby?

NICK: I was living in Long Island at the time, in Valley Stream, and I moved to Connecticut. At first I had an apartment, and later I got myself a house that was not far from Charlton. Derby was a small town.

DONNIE: Your title was assistant editor?

NICK: That's correct.

DONNIE: Did you write there, in the office?

NICK: No, I wrote at home. I felt more comfortable at home.

DONNIE: What did you do as assistant editor?

NICK: One of my duties was to run the production department, which meant when the artwork came in, if there was anything that needed to be fixed or changed, we took care of it. If there were any misspellings in the lettering or what not, we took care of that. But my main job was to put together the books. For example, if we had a ghost book coming up, say, *The Many Ghosts of Doctor Graves*, we needed, say, three stories to put in the book. So George would send me back to where we kept all the artwork for all the different stories, and I would pick out three stories and put them all together, and then I'd show them to George, and George would look them over, and he'd say, "Yeah, this is fine." If it was for *Doctor Graves*, usually Doctor Graves was the narrator, and we had a little set of icons for each of the narrators, so we would paste them in, and if the main story was the splash page, we'd have to crop it to put what was known as the indicia or the legal terms underneath the first page. That was part of the production department, and I was in charge of that.

DONNIE: Who were the staff?

NICK: Frank Bravo was one, Greta Klimas was another one—

DONNIE: Was Bravo a letterer?

NICK: He was a very good letterer. Greta was the secretary, but she also did some lettering on a typewriter.

DONNIE: Oh yeah. "A. Machine!"

Tales of the MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER
What Wilbur Saw...
BUT AFTER A SLIGHT GRIMACE OR TWO, WILBUR DEAN MERELY SHRUGGED.
BUT... BECAUSE I HAD ONE TOO, MANY!

The story Nick refers to on opposite page: Joe Gill and the splash of "What Wilbur Saw . . .", from ***Tales of the Mysterious Traveler*** #2, Feb. 1957. Art by Steve Ditko. Photo © 2013 Estate of Joe Gill. Story © Charlton Comics Group.

NICK: Whenever you saw anything that said "A. Machine," that was usually Greta.

DONNIE: Did you direct people?

NICK: I was more or less George's right-hand person; whenever anything was needed, George would tell me, "Nick, would you take care of this, would you take care of that, would you talk to the color separators," because they were right there. I would go over and do whatever had to be done.

DONNIE: So basically, you made things happen.

NICK: Pretty much. I also took care of the fan mail that came in. We used to get a submission a day of artwork from the fans, hoping we would accept their artwork for the magazines. Unfortunately, there were only about one or two submissions a year that were of a professional level. A lot of artists and writers and editors got their start at Charlton, that later went on to work at DC Comics and Marvel Comics, and so on. Dick Giordano got his start at Charlton and then went on to become one of the finest inkers and also an editor over at DC. And later, when I moved over to DC, he was my boss. Nice, nice man.

DONNIE: He was comics editor before Sal Gentile.

NICK: And then Sal Gentile took over, and then Sal moved over to magazines, and George became the editor.

DONNIE: Did you have any direct contact with management, or was that George's job?

NICK: It was mostly George's job, but I did have some contact with management too.

DONNIE: Did you deal with distribution?

NICK: Not distribution, that was something else entirely, but I did take the artwork to the plant so that it could be photographed, and plates made.

DONNIE: Any other departments you interacted with?

NICK: I was friendly with the people who worked in advertising, like Ed Sturges and a few other people, and John Tagg. John and I became very close friends. In fact, 45 years later, we still keep in touch. I spoke to the people, but I never had any official contact with them. At one point, my brother Emil took a job at Charlton and worked in the advertising department.

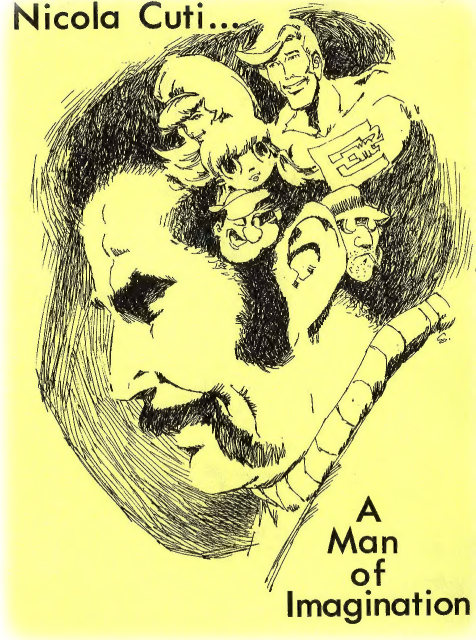
DONNIE: Did you socialize outside of the office with Joe Gill or with any of the other Charlton folks? Wasn't there a bar in the Charlton basement, or something like that? [*chuckles*]

NICK: There wasn't a regular bar in the Charlton basement, but there was an area in which a lot of events were held.

DONNIE: Like a ballroom?

NICK: It was a ballroom, exactly. And a lot of weddings were held down there, bachelor parties, and of course, they had a bar when the events were going on. But it's not like we decided to take a lunch break and go down in the basement and tip a few. It was just for the events. As a matter of fact, my bachelor party was held at Charlton, which was a very funny incident. My mom and dad had come down for the wedding, and my brother called me up and said that he and my friend John Tagg were at Charlton, and his car had a flat tire. He said, "Would you come down here and help me change the tire?" So I said, "Sure," and I realized that this was an excuse to get me down there for my bachelor party. [*laughter*] So, I told my dad, "We're going to go down there and help Emil change the tire on his car." So my father looked at me and said, "Change your pants." I was

Top: Nick examines original artwork. ***Bottom:*** Nick and Assistant Plant Foreman Chip Casio confer with editor George Wildman. Photos from 1975 educational booklet and filmstrip ***People at Work: The Comic Book***, courtesy Donnie Pitchford. © 1975, 2013 King Features Syndicate.



This tribute vignette by artist **Joe Staton** accompanied what may have been Nick's very first interview, in CPL/Gang Publications' ***Charlton Bullseye*** #1, 1975. E-Man, Nova Kane & Michael Mauser TM & © 2013 Joe Staton/ First Comics, Inc. Moonchild TM & © 2013 Nicola Cuti. Popeye TM & © 2013 King Features Syndicate.

wearing dungarees. So I said, "You want me to change my pants to change a tire?" [*laughter*] So my father said, "All right, all right, forget I said it." Of course, that was the final gag, I knew this was the bachelor party. So I went down there, and sure enough, it was all an excuse to get me down there for my bachelor party. [*laughter*] I had a few drinks and all of a sudden my mind went blank, and to this day I do not remember my bachelor party. [*laughter*]

DONNIE: You said Joe would call you sometimes to join him.

NICK: He'd be at a bar or something like that, and he'd have a desire for some company, and he'd call me up and tell me where he was, and I'd go down there, and we'd sit around and have a few drinks. I think there's a photograph of the two of us together at a bar.

DONNIE: With big grins!

NICK: Yeah, well, there was a guy there who had a camera and took a photograph of us. He had a Polaroid, and he charged us for it! We didn't realize that's what he was there for, so he says, "Five bucks for the photo," and I says, "Oh! Wow!" [*laughter*]

DONNIE: Was Joe ever critical of your scripts? Did he take the time to read them?

NICK: No, no, he was much too busy doing his own. Once in a while, I would take a story over to him, and say, "Joe, would you mind looking over this story and tell me what you think?" That was only once in a while. He was always very generous with his comments.

DONNIE: Did he ever ask for advice?

NICK: No, not that I remember. [*laughter*]

DONNIE: Do you have any other funny Joe Gill stories?

NICK: We went rafting one time and he fell out of the raft. [*laughter*] That was about the only funny thing that happened.

DONNIE: Aside from the story you read as a child, do you have a favorite Gill series?

NICK: Not really. I enjoyed a lot of Joe's stories, because I used to read them at Charlton. I used to wait until they were already published, and then I would pick up the comics and I'd read his stories. They were always very good. They were very competent, very well written. Joe had been writing for many, many years. He wrote for a lot of men's magazines and he was very close friends with Mickey Spillane, and his brother Ray Gill also wrote a lot of stories and they were in a studio together. I remember Joe told me one funny story when he was an editor at one of the men's magazines and a man came in with a story that he wanted Joe to print. Out of the blue, he says, "I have a manuscript; I want you to print it in your magazine." And Joe said, "All right, leave it with me and I'll read it." He said, "No, no, I can't leave it with you, you'll steal the story!" And Joe says, "Well, if I don't read it, how can I print it?" And the man said, "Well, I can't leave it!" and he got up and walked out! [*laughter*] I thought that was hysterical because if you don't submit the story, how do you expect it to get printed?

When I was at Wood Studio, I was working with Syd Shores, a well-known comic book artist, and I found out that he used to illustrate for the men's magazines, and

Top: A Charlton Comics colorist at work with watercolor set.

Middle: Color separations are produced by hand on acetate sheets by Charlton's large staff of specialists.

Bottom: The stripper lays out flats of negatives shot from original art, from which metal plates will be burned.

Photos from 1975 educational booklet and filmstrip ***People at Work: The Comic Book***, courtesy Donnie Pitchford. © 1975, 2013 King Features Syndicate.

he showed me a lot of his black-and-white illustrations. The men's magazines were printed in black and white, only the cover was in full color. I always thought the illustrations had been done in full color, and had been printed in black and white. But it wasn't the case. It turns out they were actually painted in black and white, in gray tones, because when you reproduce color in black and white, it very often is very bad, because reds will turn black, and yellows will turn into dark grays, and blues sometimes disappear altogether. So, in order to get a rich reproduction, you have to actually paint it in gray tones and black and white.

DONNIE: Especially orthochromatic film was bad about that. The same reason it dropped out non-repro blue.

NICK: Exactly, blues would just drop out altogether.

DONNIE: Well, you know, we're both former strippers.

NICK: Yeah! [*laughter*] You gotta explain that term! Because a friend of mine who was one of my bosses used to do that to find out if a person knew what the printing industry was like. "Stripping" means to take the negatives and put them in masking sheets [to burn the plates] that would go to the presses, so stripping was a very important position in the publishing industry. What he would do is if someone came in and said they were expert in publishing, he'd tell them, "Okay, strip!" [*laughter*] And if they looked at him kind of odd, or were indignant, he knew that they knew nothing about the publishing business and he'd say, "Leave!" But if they'd say, "Okay, give me the negatives and I'll show you how I can strip." [*laughter*]

DONNIE: It'd be hard to do now, with everything digital.

NICK: Yeah, they don't have strippers anymore. [*laughter*]

DONNIE: You'd be accused of sexual harassment. So when did you shift from an assistant editor who wrote to mainly a freelance writer?

NICK: What happened was there was so much work at Charlton. We had gotten *Space: 1999*, a comic book, and it was a black-and-white magazine as well. We had gotten *The Six Million Dollar Man*. We had a whole batch of things to write, and it was more than Joe Gill could handle, even the great Joe Gill, which was surprising. I was writing more and more stories, and finally I told George, "Look George, where do you need me more? As your assistant or as a freelance writer?" So he says, "I'll tell you the truth, Nick, I really need another freelance writer." So I said, "Fine! What I'll do is leave the post of assistant editor." I already had an assistant, and they hired another fellow by the name of Paul Delpo, and he became the assistant editor.

DONNIE: Who was your other assistant?

NICK: The other assistant was a young lady, very attractive, and very competent, Barbara something, I don't remember her last name. She was my assistant, and then Paul Delpo took the position of assistant editor, and she remained there, and I went home and just worked as a freelance writer. Charlton paid such low rates that I had to write a story a day, because at that time I had gotten married, and we had a baby, a beautiful baby girl, Jaymee. I had a wife and a daughter that I had to keep alive, clothed, and fed, so I wrote a story a day. I'd take one day out to jot down ideas and concepts, and so on, and I'd take one day that I'd write two stories, and each other day I wrote a story, so I wrote about 365 stories a year. I did that for about a year and a half, two years.

DONNIE: Was that a major boost for your salary?

NICK: As a matter of fact, it was. I did make more money as a writer than I did as assistant editor.

DONNIE: Do you have any idea of the total number of stories in your career?

NICK: No, I never counted them, I never kept track, but it's got to be somewhere around 500, 600 stories, because I wrote, as I said, about 365 stories a year. Maybe even a thousand. Because I wrote a few hundred for *Creepy* and *Eerie*. For Warren Publishing and Charlton was my largest amount of stories I wrote. And then I also wrote a few for DC and a few for Marvel. But not that many, just a handful.

DONNIE: Bill Pearson followed as assistant editor. How did that happen?

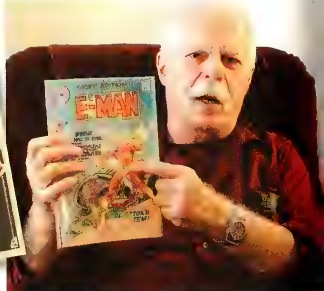
NICK: Paul Delpo didn't quite work out, and George was looking for someone to replace Paul, and I recommended Bill Pearson. Bill was a good friend of mine, and he was a close friend of Wally Wood's, and he was looking for work. So I recommended Bill, and George interviewed him and liked Bill, so he hired Bill as assistant editor.

DONNIE: Let me throw some names at you. Any stories you want to relate about how they came to work at Charlton or about them in general. Of course, the obvious: Steve Ditko.

NICK: I met Steve when I was working with Woody. Steve Ditko and Wally Wood were good friends, and Steve decided to come down to the studio. Woody and I went down to the train station to pick Steve up, and that was the first time

A colorful assortment of comics magazines Nick was involved with during his Charlton days, including the useful subscription premium ***Comic Book Guide for the Artist • Writer • Letterer***. Images TM & © 2013 respective copyright holders.

Nick Cuti and **Joe Staton** together have been a force to be reckoned with since their Charlton days. "Eternal Teacher," one of Nick's personal favorites, appeared in ***Haunted Love*** #1, Apr. 1973. ***Below:*** Nick points to the team's iconic cocreation. Photo of Nick © 2013 Donnie Pitchford. Photo of Joe © 2013 Scott Cates, courtesy Joe Staton. Story © Charlton Comics Group.



I met him, and then we drove him to the studio, and he stayed a few days and I got to know him, and he turned out to be a very, very nice gentleman. Had a great sense of humor, was always very positive. I'd heard so many stories about Steve Ditko; the loner who would not allow any photographs of himself, never gave interviews, and so I always had this picture of some weird person, but Steve was not that at all. He was just a very, very nice man. And when I worked at Charlton, Steve was a regular artist there, and he used to come into Charlton quite a bit. I would always see him there.

DONNIE: Your buddy Joe Staton.

NICK: Joe? Yeah! [*Nick is handed some comic books*] Here we go. There's some *E-Man* comics. Joe stopped at Charlton while he was on his honeymoon, so George introduced me to Joe and his lovely wife Hilarie, a very sweet lady. Joe used to draw *Primus*. It was based on a TV show, sort of a frogman who did a lot of work underwater. I liked Joe's artwork on *Primus*. And then one day, George came back from a meeting with the heads of Charlton, the Santangelos, and said, "I talked them into doing some superheroes." Charlton used to stay away from superheroes because DC and Marvel had them pretty well locked up. They had done some superheroes, like Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, but then they dropped them and just went with their adventure line. But then George said, "Come up with a superhero!" So I said, "Oh! Okay." [*laughter*] So I went back and thought.

When I was a kid, my favorite superhero was Plastic Man, and so I wanted a superhero that was like Plastic Man, but wasn't Plastic Man. And so I came up with this character called E-Man. [*gestures toward cover of* E-Man *#1*] I knew that just about every superhero always had a red and blue outfit. Spider-Man was red and blue, Superman, red and blue, and even Batman was purple, a combination of red and blue. I wanted something different for him, so I asked George if Joe Staton could illustrate my character E-Man. Since *Primus* had ended, Joe was available, and I called up Joe, and I told him about my character, and he loved everything about it. E-Man was a packet of energy that was given off when a star novaed. He traveled to Earth and took human form, and he could change himself into any form of matter or energy. That's why he has the famous Einstein formula "E=mc²" on his chest, because he can go back and forth from matter to energy, and he can also direct energy, so when a villain is coming at him, he just throws up his hands and bolts of energy would knock the villain silly.

Anyway, I told Joe about it, and he liked everything about the character except the origin story. At first the origin was that E-Man was a factory worker, there was an accident, and he became E-Man. Joe said that was dumb, so I said, "All right, I gotta come up with a better origin story," and I was reading a book on astronomy, and I read about a star novaing, and I said, "Oh! He's a packet of energy from outer space!" And so I called up Joe and said, "How about he's a packet of energy from outer space when a star novas?" and he goes, "Yeah! I like that! Go for it!" And so we did that, and Joe drew the character. I told Joe, "No cape!" because I could never see the purpose of a cape on a superhero. They get in the way, they trip over it. In fact, we even did a little satire on that in one of the *E-Man* comics. Joe drew this really nice E-Man, and then I put

a sheet over it and I colored it, and that's how he got the colors of his costume. I wrote 10 issues for Charlton, with Joe illustrating it, and he had a free hand to do whatever he wanted. He used to put little gags here and there, and I thought they were pretty funny. It was our biggest seller on subscriptions, but on the stands it sold very poorly. We suspect that it became a fan favorite, which is why it was so good in subscriptions, but it wasn't enough to keep it going, so after 10 issues they axed it. But it's been coming back. It was a fan favorite, and every fan who starts a comic book company contacts us and says, "Can we do *E-Man*?" and we say, "Sure!" and so we'd do a whole bunch. Comico did it for a while. Alpha comics did it, and later Digital Webbing, and . . . oh, First! What happened with First is that Joe became art director, so he wanted to do *E-Man*. He asked me to write it, but I was working for DC Comics at the time, and I thought DC would not let me or appreciate it when I was working for them on staff, writing this for First, which had become one of their biggest competitors. So I said, "I can't!" Later, Paul Levitz, who was the business manager of DC, called me in and said, "Nick, if you want to write *E-Man*, go ahead!" I said, "You don't mind?" and he said, "No!" Paul was a great guy; I got along with Paul very well, mainly because before Paul became DC's business manager he used to run a fanzine called *The Comic Reader*. He used to call me up and say, "Nick, what's the latest at Charlton, what's happening?" and I was always very nice to him. Later that paid off, because he was at DC when I took a job there. I wrote *E-Man* for First for a while, and then First went out of business, and then I wrote for the other fanzines whenever a fan company would ask us to do it. The latest was Digital Webbing. [***Ed. note:*** *See also* Charlton Spotlight *#6 for more E-Man.*]

DONNIE: And I love the name of the girlfriend!

NICK: Oh! Yeah, his girlfriend was a stripper, and I don't mean a stripper in graphic arts. I'm talking about the type that get up on stage and take their clothes off, but at the same time she was a college student and was just stripping as a way to work her way through college. Her name was Katrinka Kolchinski. Kolchinski was the name of my gym teacher in high school, and Katrinka was from *The Toonerville Trolley*. [***Ed. note:*** *The Physically Powerful Katrinka from* Toonerville Folks *by Fontaine Fox*] But of course she couldn't strip under the name of Katrinka Kolchinski, so she changed her name. She used the stage name Nova Kane. {*big laughs*}

DONNIE: But how fitting, with the nova and Kane, like Bob Kane, Kathy Kane . . .

NICK: Right, there were a lot of Kanes in the industry, as a matter of fact. Gil Kane, a friend of mine. I found out his name really wasn't Gil Kane, it was Eli Katz, but he changed it to Gil Kane. Gil was a really interesting character. I always liked him. But anyway, that's how she got the name Nova Kane. Joe said, "You're never going to be able to top that name." [*laughter*] And it's true; I've never come up with a name as good as that.

DONNIE: And she was a knockout! What about Tom Sutton?

NICK: Tom was a character! I met Tom when I was working at *Creepy* and *Eerie*, and then later when I went over to Charlton, Tom was an artist there, and I love his work. It was just unique. And Tom was a big bear of a man, he was tall and big and he had a huge, curly beard and huge, curly hair, and I used to call him "The Bear." I'd say,

Tom Sutton's really creepy cover for ***Creepy Things*** #1, July 1975, from the original art. © Charlton Comics Group.

"What's The Bear doing?" You know, that sort of thing. He and I became good friends, and we used to go drinking together. He had a number of wives, not at the same time! [*laughter*] In between wives, he and I used to go out drinking together and trying to pick up girls, before I had my own wife. I always liked Tom. He would call me up from time to time, and he would keep me on the phone for a good hour and a half to two hours, just talking. He loved to talk. You know, when you're an artist, it's a pretty lonely life, because you can't have distractions around you while you're working, so when you stop working, you're hungry for human company. So he would call me up and just chatter away. I used to make sure, as soon as I heard it was Tom Sutton, I'd say, "Well, I'm not doing anything for the next two hours," just listening to Tom talk.

DONNIE: Your good friend Wayne Howard.

NICK: Wayne, yeah, I had met at Wood Studios. He was one of Woody's assistants before me. Woody had a number of assistants. Ralph Reece was one, Larry Hama was one, I was one, and Wayne was one. Wayne was a very unique person. Heavy smoker.

Wayne Howard and his signature title ***Midnight Tales***; depicted is #2, Feb. 1973. Could that be a self-portrait on the left? Photo from Wayne's online obituary of Dec. 9, 2007. *Midnight Tales* © Charlton Comics Group.

which is what finally did him in, unfortunately, and he always wore the same outfit: black pants, a tan bush jacket, and a hat, a white shirt, and a black tie. Every time he came to the office, he always had that same outfit. And then when I was over at his apartment one time, he opened up his closet, and there were about 10 bush jackets, 10 pairs of black pants, 10— [*big laughter*] and I said, "Oh my God!" I thought it was the same outfit, you know? I used to go over to his apartment all the time and he would come over to mine. He said he had an idea for a series called *Midnight Tales*. It was originally called *Midnight* but the publisher insisted that he add *Tales* onto it. He had an idea for the narrators to be Professor Coffin and his niece Arachne, sort of a take-off on the arachnids, which were spiders. He said he would like to have me work with him on it as a writer. And I said, "You know, I've always wanted to set up something kind of unique for a series. I'd like the cover to have nothing to do with anything inside the comic. [*audience laughter*] I'd like the cover to be a gag in itself." Because I'd seen that in a few comics, where they had a gag for a cover, and then you'd open up the comic, and the cover would have nothing to do with the story inside. I said, "I'd like to try that," and he liked that idea. So the cover was always a gag in itself. Then he wanted the two of them, Professor Coffin and Arachne, to be the narrators. I said, "Why don't we have a little story with them, and that would lead into the stories in the comic, but the story with Professor Coffin and Arachne would be a separate story all by itself."

DONNIE: They were the framing device?

NICK: Right, and each comic had its own theme. One time we did a theme of blob characters, where each story was about a blob. One time we did a story with vampires. One time we did a story of kids, and the whole theme was about that.

DONNIE: Here's another name for you: Sanho Kim.

NICK: He was a Korean artist. He did a lot of very nice work for Charlton. I don't know how he got there, but he was already a regular artist at Charlton when I was there. He had an idea for a series called "Wrong Country," in which a Korean would come to the West and try to fit in with the people in the West, but it never came to be. [***Ed. note:*** *The original art for Kim's "Wrong Country" was lost in the mails between Tokyo and Derby in late 1973. In a panic, George Wildman asked Joe Gill to create a substitute feature, which became* Yang, *illustrated by Warren Sattler. Eventually the art turned up but was shelved, as it was the time of the paper shortage of 1974, when Charlton's entire comics line went on a temporary hiatus. In 1975* "Wrong Country" *was published for the first time in the CPL/Gang fanzine* Charlton Bullseye *#3.*]

DONNIE: Did he work in Derby, or did he send his work in?

NICK: He did stop in occasionally at Derby.

DONNIE: There was a team of guys who had been in

comics for years and they normally worked together for Charlton. Charles Nicholas—

NICK: Yeah, Charles Nicholas and Vince Alascia. They only signed their last names, so a lot of people thought they were one person! [*audience laughs*] They thought it was a person called "Nicholas Alascia." Yeah, they were regulars. What happened was, there was a flood at Charlton. [***Ed. note:*** *Hurricane Diane struck New England in August 1955, flooding Derby and putting the Charlton plant under 18 feet of water.*] It destroyed most of the magazines and comics and so on, and the Old Man said, "Look," he told everyone, all the artists and writers, "if you stick with me, I can only pay you about half of what I have been paying you," which wasn't a lot to start with! But he said, "If you stick with me, once everything gets back and we get rolling again, and you get back to your old salaries, you will have a job with me for life, for as long as you want it. As long as there is a company." Nicholas and Alascia were two of the people who stuck with the Old Man. A lot of people left, but they were two that stuck with Santangelo. They were always there working. Joe Gill was also one. Funny story about Joe. He wrote under a lot of different names because the Old Man didn't like the idea of giving one person so much money. So Joe wrote under different names, "Jim Beam," "Johnnie Walker," and so on. [*audience laughter*] He would submit scripts with that name. One day he had to visit with John Santangelo, and Santangelo knew that. He knocked on Santangelo's door, and Santangelo said, "Who's there?" He said, "Joe Gill," and the old man said, "Come on in, boys!" [*audience laughs*]

DONNIE: Don Newton.

NICK: Oh, yeah! I like to think I was helpful in discovering him. He was a friend of Bill Pearson, by the way, and he had sent work to Marvel and DC and was turned down. Then he sent work to us, and I said, "This guy is fantastic!" He had, again, his own unique style. It was really great! We were looking for an artist for *The Phantom*, and I brought his stuff to George, and I said, "George, you gotta look at this guy, he's great!" I told you we had about one or two submissions a year that were professional quality. Well, Don's was one of them. As a result, we used him on a regular basis. He did *The Phantom* for us, and he went on to do work for all the big companies, because once they saw what this guy could do, they said, "This guy's great!" But he got his start at Charlton. One time we decided to try and do painted covers, and Don did some beautiful paintings.

DONNIE: Oh yes! And Mike Zeck.

NICK: Mike was an interesting character. He had submitted some work, and I liked it very much. I showed it to George, and George didn't like his artwork. I was heartbroken, because I thought Mike was a great talent. So anyway, George went on vacation, and he gave me a batch of scripts, and he said, "Here, send these out to whichever artists you want to illustrate them." Well, I took a chance. Now, this was really risky, because I could have lost my job. I sent Mike Zeck a bunch of the scripts. [*audience chuckles*] When the artwork came back, and George saw that it was

Concept drawing by artist **Don Newton** for his and Nick's never-realized project **Mastermind**, from the original art. TM & © 2013 Nicola Cuti & Estate of Don Newton.

Mike Zeck, he called me in and says, "I thought I told you not to use this guy!" I said, "Look at the stuff, George." And he looked at it, and he says, "You know, it's pretty good!" [*audience laughs*] He said, "Send him some more scripts!" Well, Joe Gill loved Mike's artwork, and he requested him a lot. So Mike became a regular, and he moved down to Derby, and while he was looking for a place to stay, my wife and I put him up in our house.

DONNIE: Here's a name that goes back several years, interesting guy, signed his name "PAM."

NICK: Oh, Pete Morisi! He was a cop, and he used to freelance for Charlton. I always liked his artwork; very, very good. Very stylized. He did a series called *Vengeance Squad*. I'm going to be honest. The people at Charlton, the artists at Charlton, were told, "Do whatever you want with the scripts." They could follow the script, they didn't have to follow the script. Because Charlton wasn't all that crazy about its comics. They were just fodder to keep the presses going. You see, they only closed the presses twice a year to clean them, so they were running continuously, 24 hours a day, and they needed material. The comics provided

material to keep the presses rolling, and that's the way the people upstairs used to look at the comics department, just something to keep the presses rolling, so they didn't care about them. Well, Pete Morisi edited a lot. He wasn't the only one. A lot of artists did, but Pete edited a lot of scripts, because he didn't like big word balloons. Unfortunately, it ruined a lot of stories. I read them, and I'm saying, "I can't believe Joe Gill wrote this," because I've read a lot of Joe's stories. They were always very intelligent, very well written, and these were very vapid, almost nothing there. Then I found out about the policy that the artists could change the stories any way they wanted. I had written a story that Pete Morisi illustrated. It was called "Charm," and it was about this girl who had the ability to charm men. She'd use this ability to force men to do anything she wanted, including murder and robbery and so on. Finally, one of the men shot her and she was dying, and she said, "I'm not worried. I know that I'm going to hell, but I'm going to charm the devil." [*audience chuckles*] So the devil came in the form of a cloaked figure, and she said, "Oh, I can get you to do whatever I want, because I have power over men," and then the devil removed the cloak, and it was the devil's wife, Lilith, and she said, "That's why Satan sent me!" And that was the end of the story. Well, Pete had done the devil as a man! [*audience laughs*] I said, "Kinda ruins the end of the story!" [*more laughter*] Luckily, I'd written the story, and I was the head of the production department, so I redrew that last panel so that the devil turned out to be a woman. Then it made sense. But it shows you how little respect a lot of the artists had for these stories. Not all of them. I'd be wrong to say that. And not always. Very often, the artists did very fine work on the stories. But occasionally not, and that was one instance.

DONNIE: Tell us about the South American artists.

NICK: We were turning out comics at such a rate that we needed some more artists, so we turned to this group in South America. They were very good, very polished artists, but they weren't very knowledgeable of American culture. Anything involving America; like we had a story that was set in the 1950s, and they got all the clothing wrong, and then we had a Korean war story, and they had a Japanese officer brandishing a sword in the middle of the freezing Korean weather. We had modern fighter jets like Phantoms fighting in World War II, and of course there were no Phantom jets in World War II. So we constantly had problems like that with the South Americans. We were very careful to provide them with photographs if we had a period piece, because we couldn't trust them to do the research on their own. But otherwise they were extremely competent artists, very polished.

Nick, Ken Wheaton (artist on some IDW ***Popeye*** comics), and unidentified winner in her category for her drawing of Alice the Goon during the "Segar Sketchers" competition at the Popeye Picnic in Chester, IL, Saturday, Sept. 8, 2012. The drawing at left by Ken illustrates Nick's "assignment" of a story idea as part of Ken's drawing demo. Photo © 2013 Donnie Pitchford.

DONNIE: What was it like working with George on *Popeye*?

NICK: I would go over to George and I'd tell him an idea I had for a story, and if he liked the idea, he said, "Yeah, go with it," and 10 times out of 10 he liked the ideas. So I'd just type it all up as a script and give it to George, and then I'd see the pages coming in. It was a very simple process.

DONNIE: He never threw a script back at you?

NICK: I don't recall him doing that. He might have some suggestions on the storyline, but that was about it. George was a very generous boss and also a very generous person to work with. It would be more colorful if I could tell you otherwise [*audience laughs*], but it wouldn't be true. When George asked me to write *Popeye*, I did a lot of research. I went through some old strips in books, collections of *Popeye*, and I saw how the language was, and a lot of "isk" sounds, like "fisk" and "grotisk" and things like that, and so I put in a lot of "isk" sounds, and I also noticed how Popeye mangled language, so whenever I had to write a *Popeye* story I just got into the mode of that language. I got a bunch of *Popeye* cartoons, the Fleischer cartoons, and would see how he would use and misuse language.

DONNIE: Do you remember when Charlton printed the early issues of Larry Flynt's *Hustler*?

NICK: Yes! I was working there in the studio when Larry Flynt came in with his *Hustler* magazine.

DONNIE: Did that create a stir, or was that just another job?

NICK: It created a bit of a stir, because they had put a woman in charge of the magazine. I don't recall her name, but a very nice lady. But she was fairly strait-laced, and she would be seeing all of this nudity, and it was pretty raw stuff. It was much more raw than *Playboy* or any of the magazines like *Penthouse* at that time. She told me one time that she went to a convention. This was before anyone had heard of *Hustler.* She was sitting at a table and there was a big sign over her saying, "*Hustler!*" She said, "I

Left: Nick receives the coveted Inkpot award at the 2009 San Diego Comic-Con International. Photo courtesy of and © 2013 Nicola Cuti.

Below: Nick's latest release is ***Moonie and the Spider Queen: Episode One***, available from Amazon. Moonie TM & © 2013 Nicola Cuti.

hated that, I felt so embarrassed, but what else could I do? I was there to push the magazine!"

DONNIE: How long did Flynt publish through Charlton?

NICK: I don't remember; it wasn't very long. He published, I don't know, maybe six issues, something like that. I couldn't be sure, and then he moved it to someplace else.

DONNIE: So when did you actually leave Charlton?

NICK: I left Charlton in 1975 to go freelance, and then what happened was exactly what happened to Joe Gill, they suddenly discovered that they were paying me an awful lot of money. It wasn't really a lot of money, but for Charlton it was. Someone at the top decided to cut me off. So I suddenly found myself without a job. And that's when I got a job with Jim Warren. That itself is an interesting story.

DONNIE: We could do an entire interview there. Was that vastly different from Charlton?

NICK: It was much different, sure. We had the editorial offices at Warren, and that was it. Everything was sent out. Whereas at Charlton, it was an entire factory.

DONNIE: Did you keep in touch with a lot of Charlton friends after you left? Did anyone follow you to Warren or any of the other companies?

NICK: None of them followed me, but I did keep in touch with John Tagg. He and I were close friends there, and to this day, we still keep in touch. And Joe Gill, every so often I'd give him a call and I'd talk with him. As a matter of fact, when Mike was going to do the issue on Joe, he asked me to paint the cover. [***Ed. note:*** *See* Charlton Spotlight *#5.*] Mike sent me a whole batch of photographs of Joe, and I painted the cover, and I did some of the characters that he created and surrounded him, and this [*pointing at cover*] was supposed to be Countess Von Bludd, who was the narrator of one of the Charlton ghost comics [***Ed. note:*** Scary Tales]. Joe created that character, so I put her in there. When this issue was printed, Mike wanted to return the painting to me, and I said, "No, give it to Joe." I understand Joe had it framed and it was hanging in his apartment until he passed away. Then it went to his niece.

DONNIE: When you won the Ray Bradbury Award at Warren, was that for a specific story, or—

NICK: No, I received that fairly early [1970], and it was for "Most Promising Writer of the Year," more or less, which was nice, because 40 years later I received the Inkpot and that was for *all* my work in comics.

DONNIE: A lifetime achievement award?

NICK: Right.

DONNIE: Up to that point!

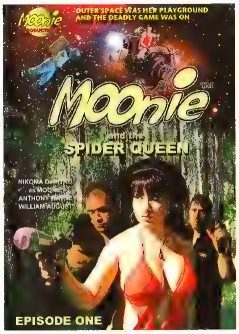
NICK: Yeah! Yeah, my life hasn't ended yet! So, it was sort of like a capsule, you know what I mean? The beginning, the Warren award, then toward the end, the latter part of my career, the Inkpot. As if to say "promising" and "fulfilled the promise."

DONNIE: Yeah! And keep adding ink!

NICK: There you go! Right!

DONNIE: What are you working on right now?

NICK: I'm working in live action. I'm doing movies. It's just another form of storytelling; I'm always looking for different ways to tell stories. And I'm also writing novels, and I think all of my experience in writing has allowed me to go through novels at a fairly quick rate. I thought I was going to have a lot of trouble with novels. The first one I had a great deal of problems with, but after that, I was just knocking them out, and I can continue to knock them out without any problem, which is a lot of fun. You can buy them on Amazon and they're all based on my character Moonie, because I just have a lot of fun writing science fiction and eroticism. They're definitely not for kids. And now I'm in the process of doing a movie based on my first novel, *Moonie and the Spider Queen*. In fact, we start shooting in about three days. So [*chuckles*], I haven't got much time after I leave here to get rolling. And I'm starting to work in sculptures too, because I just want another outlet. I'm doing sculptures of my character Moonie in clay, and then I'm going to have it cast in resin. But I haven't gotten to that point yet, I'm just working in clay, because I haven't been satisfied with the sculptures. When I come up with one that I'm happy with, then I'll get it cast. I don't like to release anything until I'm at least satisfied that it's good enough. So right now, I'm just in the process of experimenting.



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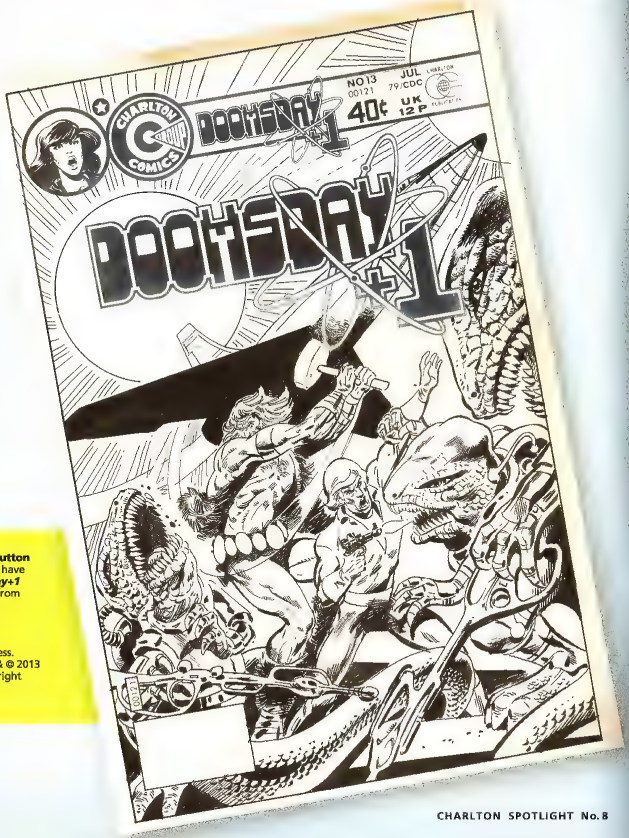
presenting . . .

a lost Charlton story by *Tom Sutton*, *published here for the very first time!*



Cover by **Tom Sutton** for what would have been ***Doomsday+1*** #13, July 1979, from the original art.

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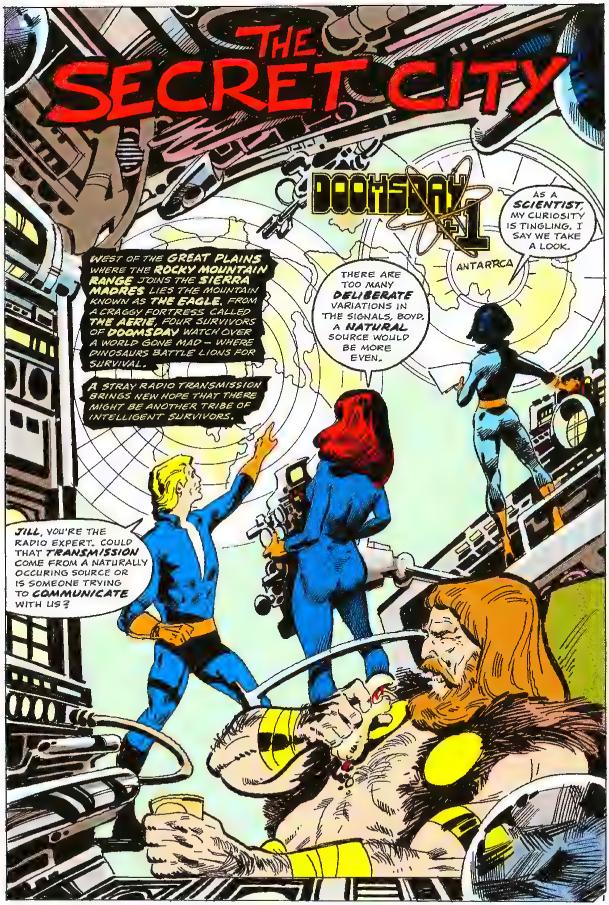
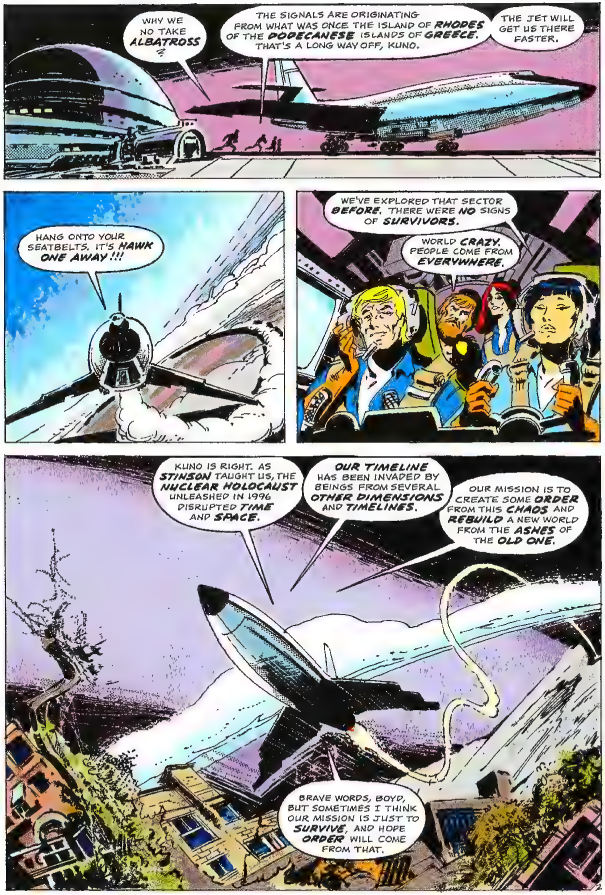
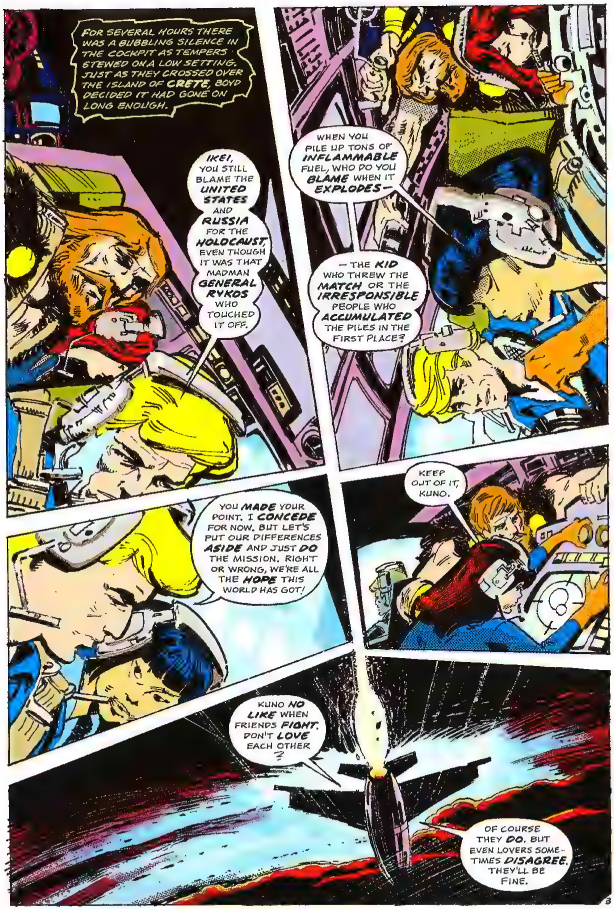
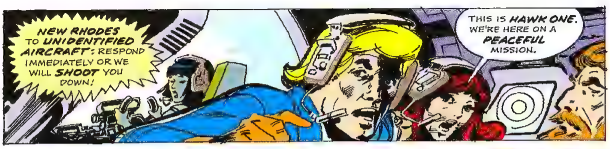

THE SECRET CITY
DOOMSDAY #1
WEST OF THE GREAT PLAINS WHERE THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RANGE JOINS THE SIERRA MADRES LIES THE MOUNTAIN KNOWN AS THE EAGLE. FROM A CRAGGY FORTRESS CALLED THE AERIE, FOUR SURVIVORS OF DOOMSDAY WATCH OVER A WORLD GONE MAD – WHERE DINOSAURS BATTLE LIONS FOR SURVIVAL.
A STRAY RADIO TRANSMISSION BRINGS NEW HOPE THAT THERE MIGHT BE ANOTHER TRIBE OF INTELLIGENT SURVIVORS.
ANTARRCA
AS A SCIENTIST, MY CURIOSITY IS TINGLING, I SAY WE TAKE A LOOK.
THERE ARE TOO MANY DELIBERATE VARIATIONS IN THE SIGNALS, BOYD, A NATURAL SOURCE WOULD BE MORE EVEN..
JILL, YOU'RE THE RADIO EXPERT. COULD THAT TRANSMISSION COME FROM A NATURALLY OCCURING SOURCE OR IS SOMEONE TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH US?


WHY WE NO TAKE ALBATROSS
THE SIGNALS ARE ORIGINATING FROM WHAT WAS ONCE THE ISLAND OF RHODES OF THE DODECANESE ISLANDS OF GREECE. THAT'S A LONG WAY OFF, KUNO.
THE JET WILL GET US THERE FASTER.
HANG ONTO YOUR SEATBELTS. IT'S HAWK ONE AWAY!!!
WE'VE EXPLORED THAT SECTOR BEFORE. THERE WERE NO SIGNS OF SURVIVORS.
WORLD CRAZY. PEOPLE COME FROM EVERYWHERE.
KUNO IS RIGHT. AS STINSON TAUGHT US, THE NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST UNLEASHED IN 1996 DISRUPTED TIME AND SPACE.
OUR TIMELINE HAS BEEN INVADED BY BEINGS FROM SEVERAL OTHER DIMENSIONS AND TIMELINES.
OUR MISSION IS TO CREATE SOME ORDER FROM THIS CHAOS AND REBUILD A NEW WORLD FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD ONE.
BRAVE WORDS, BOYD, BUT SOMETIMES I THINK OUR MISSION IS JUST TO SURVIVE, AND HOPE ORDER WILL COME FROM THAT.

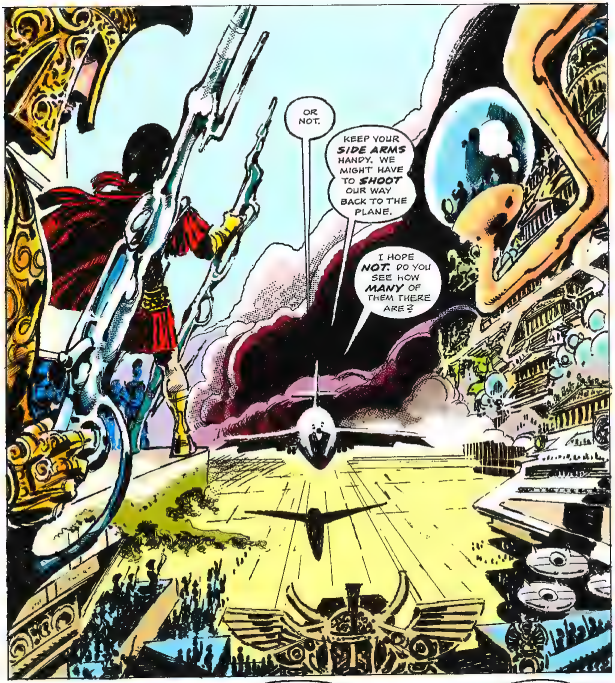

FOR SEVERAL HOURS THERE WAS A BUBBLING SILENCE IN THE COCKPIT AS TEMPERS STEWED ON A LOW SETTING. JUST AS THEY CROSSED OVER THE ISLAND OF CRETE, BOYD DECIDED IT HAD GONE ON LONG ENOUGH.
IKE! YOU STILL BLAME THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA FOR THE HOLOCAUST, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS THAT MADMAN GENERAL RYKOS WHO TOUCHED IT OFF.
WHEN YOU PILE UP TONS OF INFLAMMABLE FUEL, WHO DO YOU BLAME WHEN IT EXPLODES—
—THE KID WHO THREW THE MATCH OR THE IRRESPONSIBLE PEOPLE WHO ACCUMULATED THE PILES IN THE FIRST PLACE?
KEEP OUT OF IT, KUNO.
YOU MADE YOUR POINT. I CONCEDE FOR NOW, BUT LET'S PUT OUR DIFFERENCES ASIDE AND JUST DO THE MISSION. RIGHT OR WRONG, WE'RE ALL THE HOPE THIS WORLD HAS GOT!
KUNO NO LIKE WHEN FRIENDS FIGHT. DON'T LOVE EACH OTHER ?
OF COURSE THEY DO. BUT EVEN LOVERS SOMETIMES DISAGREE. THEY'LL BE FINE.


NEW RHODES TO UNIDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT: RESPOND IMMEDIATELY OR WE WILL SHOOT YOU DOWN!
THIS IS HAWK ONE. WE'RE HERE ON A PEACEFUL MISSION.

THERE'S NO NEED FOR AN AGGRESSIVE ATTITUDE. GIVE US LANDING COORDINATES AND WE WILL PROVE WE MEAN NO HARM!

YOU ARE BEING TRACKED. DO NOT VARY FROM YOUR COURSE OR WE WILL SEND INTERCEPTORS. 36 DEGREES 10 MINUTES NORTH, 28 DEGREES ZERO MINUTES EAST. YOU MAY CARRY SIDE ARMS BUT NOTHING LARGER.

THEY ARE EITHER BEING VERY CAUTIOUS OR THEY ARE VERY WARLIKE!
WE'VE BEEN TO THE DODECANESE ISLANDS BEFORE. RHODES WAS UNINHABITED. WHERE DID THESE PEOPLE COME FROM?
I GUESS WE'LL FIND OUT. I HOPE THE ANSWER WON'T COST US OUR LIVES.
SO, YOU THINK ALL THEIR THREATS ARE REAL?
LET'S NOT JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS. THEY MAY BE QUITE PEACEFUL.


OR NOT.
KEEP YOUR SIDE ARMS HANDY. WE MIGHT HAVE TO SHOOT OUR WAY BACK TO THE PLANE.
I HOPE NOT. DO YOU SEE HOW MANY OF THEM THERE ARE?

THEY'RE SENDING OUT A WELCOMING COMMITEE OF ONE AND HE'S UNARMED. THAT'S A GOOD SIGN.
YEAH, BUT THERE'S A SQUAD OF HOPLITES, FULLY ARMED WITH WEIRD LOOKING DORUS STANDING JUST SIX FEET AWAY.
US

I'M CAPTAIN BOYD ELLIS, COMMANDER OF THE DOOMSDAY SURVIVORS.
I AM DELOS, THE STRATEGOS OF THE RHODIAN ARMY.
WE'RE VERY IMPRESSED BY ALL YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED HERE. YOU'VE COMPLETELY REBUILT THE CITY AND ESTABLISHED A POWERFUL ARMY.
BUT WHERE DO YOU COME FROM AND WHY DO YOU COPY THE ANCIENT GREEK CULTURE?
WE ARE FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION. YOUR NUCLEAR WARS OPENED THE DOORWAY TO OUR WORLD. AS FOR THE CULTURE, IT WAS HERE, BUT BURIED.
WE RESURRECTED IT AND ADAPTED IT TO OUR OWN TECHNOLOGY.
BOYD, TAKE A LOOK OVER HERE. THESE GUYS ARE EXTREMELY ADVANCED.

THE LADY SPEAKS THE TRUTH. OUR ARMIES ARE FULLY PREPARED FOR WORLD CONQUEST.
WE'VE WASTED ENOUGH TIME WITH THE LIKES OF YOU, HOPLITES! TAKE THEM PRISONER.
KUNO!!!
I HEAR YOU, BO YUD!
WHAP!
BA-ZAAAT!

BOYD, THERE'S TOO MANY OF THEM. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD THEM OFF FOR LONG!
KUNO IS OUR ONLY HOPE!
GIVE HIM SUPPORT AND HE'LL LEAD US OUT!
BLAM!
THE GIANT HAS CAUSED ENOUGH PROBLEMS.
WITHOUT THEIR WARRIOR JUGGERNAUT, THE OTHERS SURRENDER TO OVERWHELMING SUPERIOR FORCES.
THE TIME FOR DECEPTION IS OVER. I WILL SHOW YOU MY TRUE FACE.
YOU'RE AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL. YOU'RE FROM THIS DIMENSION, BUT FROM ANOTHER WORLD.
EARTH IS RIPE FOR CONQUEST ISN'T IT?
YES, IT IS, BUT I AM NOT YOUR WORST ENEMY. I AM ONLY HIS ALLY.

I ARRIVED ON EARTH SOON AFTER THE GREAT HOLOCAUST TO HELP REBUILD CIVILIZATION. BUT ALL I FOUND WERE ANIMALS. SO I INCREASED THEIR INTELLIGENCE, HOPING THAT WAS THE ANSWER.
I WAS WRONG. I COULD NOT BREED OUT THEIR SAVAGERY. NOW YOU MUST FACE THEIR LEADER, LYKOS. MAY THE GODS PROTECT YOU.
BOYD, NONE OF THE TRIBES WE'VE RUN ACROSS IN THE PAST COULD POSSIBLY DEFEAT SO GREAT AND WELL TRAINED AN ARMY AS THIS.
IT'S WORLD DOMINATION TIME AND WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE FACING!
IT MIGHT NOT BE TOO BAD, IKE!. THE WORLD UNDER THE RULE OF THE GREEKS AND ROMANS WAS A WORLD AT PEACE!
ART, WRITING AND POETRY WERE PREVALENT, AND EVENTUALLY SELF-RULE WAS ALLOWED. THERE WAS ACTUALLY A THIRTY YEAR PERIOD WHEN THERE WERE NO WARS ANYWHERE.
SORRY, BOYD, BUT I DON'T THINK THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
GREETINGS, MAMMALS. I AM LYKOS, WARLORD OF RHODES. THE DAY OF MAMMAL CONTROL OF THE EARTH IS OVER. THE DAY OF THE REPTILE HAS RETURNED!
THE THING ON THE THRONE WAS NEITHER HUMAN OR BEAST, BUT A HIDEOUS CONGLOMERATION OF BOTH.

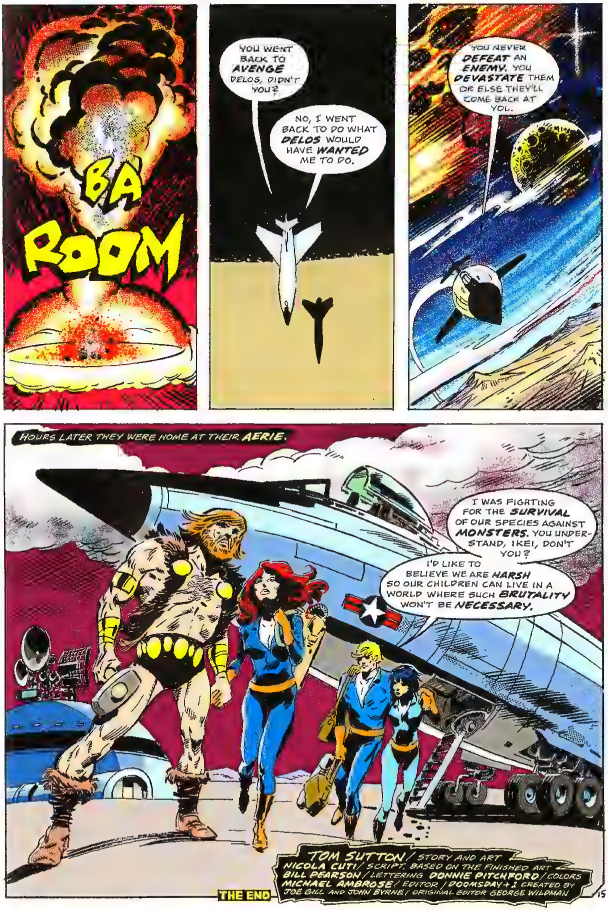
WHAT ABOUT THEM? YOUR SOLDIERS ARE MAMMALS, THE SAME AS WE ARE.
LOOK CLOSER, MAMMAL. WE LEARNED A LITTLE TRICK FROM OUR ALIEN FRIEND.
IT'S CALLED SHAPE SHIFTING.
BRING DOWN THE CHAMBERS!
A BLINDING LIGHT STUNNED THE PRISONERS AS HUMAN-SIZED BOTTLES DESCENDED OVER THEM.
THIS IS WHERE YOU WILL STAY UNTIL I DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH YOU. I MIGHT TORTURE YOU TO EXTRACT YOUR KNOWLEDGE.
OR I MAY JUST EAT YOU FOR DINNER.
JILL, SOMETHING IS HAPPENING OUT THERE. I'M IN A BAD POSITION. CAN YOU SEE IT?

IT'S THE ALIEN, DELOS! HE'S ATTACKING THE CITY!
HE'S TRYING TO GIVE US COVER!
KUNO, CAN YOU BREAK THROUGH THE GLASS?
SMASH!
FIND THE PANEL. PRESS ALL THE BUTTONS! ONE OF THEM SHOULD RELEASE US!
CHAOS SPREAD THROUGH THE CITY AS THE ALIEN PRESSED HIS ATTACK.
SO! THE RATS ARE SCURRYING AWAY!

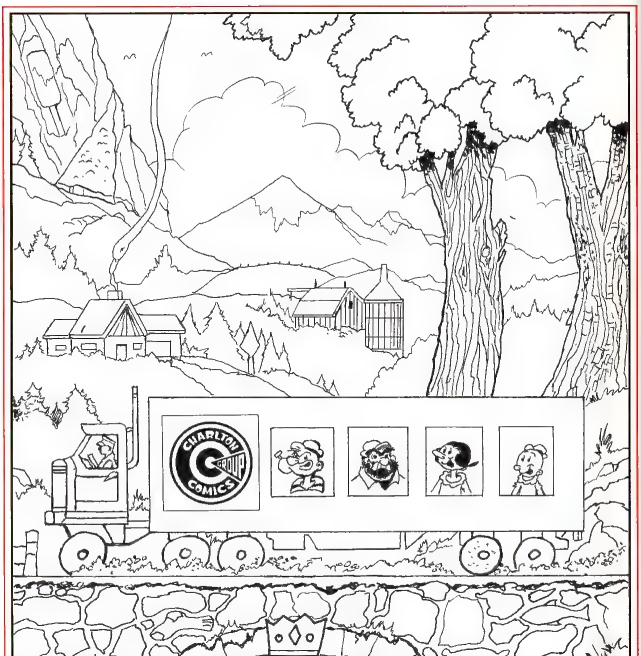
THE ALIEN HAS BETRAYED ME. I WILL DEAL WITH HIM AFTER I SMASH YOU INTO THE GROUND!
WE MAMMALS NO SMASH SO EASY!
BOK!
GET ME INTO THE PLANE! ONCE WE'RE IN THE AIR WE'LL HAVE A CHANCE!
KUNO SMASH THEM ALL!
NOT NOW, BIG GUY. WE'VE GOT TO TAKE OFF!
VROOOMM!
VOOOOSH!

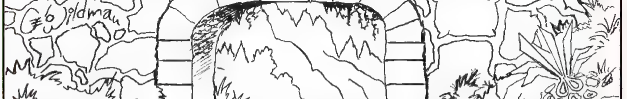
HEY! THAT'S NOT DELOS. IT'S ONE OF LYKOS' SOLDIERS.
HE'S CLOSING IN ON US. I CAN'T ESCAPE FROM HIM.
ZOT
HERE COMES DELOS. HE'S POSITIONING HIMSELF BETWEEN THE SOLDIER AND US!
I'VE GOT TO GIVE HIM COVER FIRE!
HE'S IN MY LINE OF FIRE! I CAN'T--
DELOS !!!
HERE COMES LYKOS' SQUADRON. FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS AMIGOS.
WE'RE IN FOR ONE HORRENDOUS DOGFIGHT!

THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM.
I'M GOING AFTER THE CITY.
THEY HAVE HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED ANTI-AIRCRAFT.
IT'S A FIGHT TO THE DEATH. NO MERCY EXPECTED AND NO MERCY GIVEN!
GHINGA GHINGA!
KE-RASS
SHOKITA


BA
ROOM
YOU WENT BACK TO AVENGE DELOS, DIDN'T YOU?
NO, I WENT BACK TO DO WHAT DELOS WOULD HAVE WANTED ME TO DO.
YOU NEVER DEFEAT AN ENEMY. YOU DEVASTATE THEM OR ELSE THEY'LL COME BACK AT YOU.
HOURS LATER THEY WERE HOME AT THEIR AERIE.
I WAS FIGHTING FOR THE SURVIVAL OF OUR SPECIES AGAINST MONSTERS. YOU UNDERSTAND, IKEI, DON'T YOU?
I'D LIKE TO BELIEVE WE ARE HARSH SO OUR CHILDREN CAN LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SUCH BRUTALITY WON'T BE NECESSARY.
THE END
TOM SUTTON / STORY AND ART
NICOLA CUTI / SCRIPT, BASED ON THE FINISHED ART
BILL PEARSON / LETTERING DONNIE DITCHFORD / COLORS
MICHAEL AMBROSE / EDITOR / POEMSPY #1 CREATED BY JOE GILL AND JOHN BYRNE / ORIGINAL EDITOR GEORGE WILDMAN
15

Hidden Objects *by* George Wildman





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Answers on page 52.

Scary Tales of *Creepy Things* from *Baron Weirwulf's Haunted Library* or I Remember Charlton

by Paul Kupperberg

Portrait of the Charlton writer as a young man, circa 1975. Photo courtesy of and © 2013 Paul Kupperberg ***Left:*** A boy never forgets his first time. ***Scary Tales*** #3 (Dec. 1975), with a stunning cover painted by Tom Sutton. © Charlton Comics Group.

ON MY WAY IN to the second day of the 2008 New York Comicon, I threw a few old comics into my backpack, in case I happened to run into the artists who worked on them. Most of them were landmark (to me, anyway) issues of comics I'd written early in my career that I wanted signed by the artists associated with them: the Neal Adams–inked cover of the issue of *Superman Family* where my first story for DC saw print (I thought to do this way too late; the cover's penciler, Curt Swan, was long gone, as was the penciler of the story itself, Marshall Rogers, recently dead, way too young, and inker Frank Springer was out of comics, living somewhere in Maine last I heard, painting); *Showcase* #94, penciled by Joe Staton; *The New Adventures of Supergirl* #1 by Carmine Infantino (I also brought *Teen Titans* #13, my favorite comic book art job of the 1960s, and had it signed by Nick Cardy—but that's the fanboy side of me) . . . and *Scary Tales* #3, the comic book that printed my first professional comic story, which I sold to Charlton Comics in 1975 and which would be drawn by Mike Zeck.

I didn't know if Mike was even going to be at the show (not to keep you in suspense, he wasn't, or if he was, I never ran into him; I'll catch him at some other convention, eventually), but that comic book, with its spooky Tom Sutton painted cover, is very important to me. And, because of that—and for a host of other reasons I'll get to—Charlton, funky, poorly printed, badly distributed Charlton, has long been important to me as well.

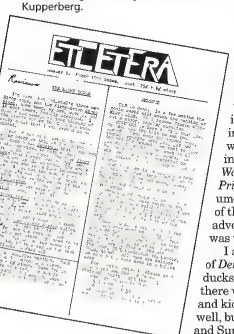
I did see Joe Staton at the show. Joe's a friend, someone I've worked with countless times at just about every job I've ever had, but long before I knew the man I was a fan of his *E-Man* and a hundred other Charlton stories in the early '70s.

I also spent some time with Frank McLaughlin that day, 1960s stalwart of the little company that could, with his creation *Judomaster*. Frank's someone else I've come to know in later years, long after I read his comics during my own personal "Golden Age of Comics," the '60s. So are Denny (Sergius O'Shaughnessy) O'Neil and the late Dick Giordano. Others I've met only briefly, or interacted with professionally at a distance, like Steve Ditko, Don Newton, Vinnie Colletta, Pete Morisi, Jim Aparo, Sam Glanzman, Don Perlin, and Pat Boyette. Of my coevals, the Charlton creators of the mid-'70s, I count the aforementioned Mr. (and Mrs. Hilarie) Staton and John Byrne as friends, while I've crossed paths with many of the others, including Zeck and, of course, the fabulous and lovely Nick Cuti, who bought my very first professional script.

I come by my fannish credentials honestly. I've been

a reader since . . . well, I don't remember a time I *didn't* read comics. My earliest memories of them feature coverless issues of the Bob Kanigher/Ross Andru/Mike Esposito *Wonder Woman*, probably from the little atmospheric used bookstore on St. Johns Place, around the corner from where we lived in Brooklyn, owned by a man named Dave Solomon; Dave later moved his bookstore to Argyle Road, off Church Avenue, up the block from my brother Alan's apartment, and which I "rediscovered" in high school and made the connection to St. Johns Place. (Just to complete the circle, I would take over as editor of *Wonder Woman* in 1994; then, in 2012, I was asked to write the introduction to *Wonder Woman: The Amazon Princess Archives*, Volume 1, reprinting the era of the Amazing Amazon's adventures on which I was weaned.)

The fanzine that made pros out of Paul Levitz and Paul Kupperberg, ***Etcetera*** #1 (Mar. 1971). ***Below:*** The writer in his Brooklyn bedroom in a photograph dated April 1975, around the time of his first sale to Charlton Comics. Images courtesy of and © 2013 Paul Kupperberg.



I also have memories of *Dennis the Menace* and ducks and mice, so I'm sure there were funny animal and kids' comics in there as well, but it's Wonder Woman and Superman who stand out for me. I drifted into collecting and then full-fledged obsession (DC all the way; my brother collected Marvels, so anything I wanted to read I snuck from his shelves) in 1968 or thereabouts when I met a fellow student at Meyer Levin Junior High School by the name of Paul Levitz. We were about 12 at the time. (In 2008, I introduced my son to Paul's mother, realizing that I was his very same age when Paul and I first met, over 40 years earlier: Mrs. Levitz looked at him, looked at me, and said "It's you!" She was being too kind; he's much better looking than I ever was.)

Paul was a fellow fan and, through him, I discovered fanzines, which we began producing together, first on mimeograph machines (Google it!), then by Xerox, and finally big-time photo-offset printing when we assumed stewardship of *The Comic Reader*, the legendary zine originated by Jerry Bails (Father of Modern Comics Fandom, in case you didn't know) and Roy Thomas in the dark ages of organized fandom, which in turn led us to publishing other fanzines and a whole host of other activities, including producing the program book for several years of Phil Sueling's legendary New York Comic Convention in the early '70s. Paul was eventually hired by Joe Orlando at DC Comics as his fill-in assistant in the summer of 1973, and I made that first sale to Charlton in April 1975.

When I was a boy (yes, I am *that* old), we had, I think, eight comic book companies to choose from. DC (we still called it National Periodical Publications, or just National or NPP, in those days), Marvel, Archie, Dell, Gold Key, Harvey, Warren, and Charlton. If a fan were so inclined, it was actually possible to buy everything all these publishers offered off the newsstand (*way* long before the comic shop era; we used to buy our comics in candy stores, drugstores, newsstands, and spinner racks in stationery and cigar stores). If not, you could pick your genre: superhero, Western, war, romance, race cars, funny animal, little kids, comics for girls, seasonal comics (remember Shelly Mayer's annual *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* comics from the '50s and '60s?).

There was something for everybody, and it was available where anyone could find it!

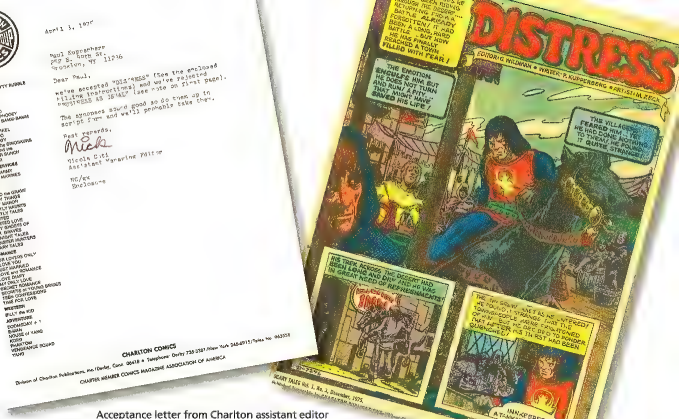
What a concept.

Charlton was legendary for its low pay rates. One writer-artist who came in during the early 1970s said that he liked to think of the $4-a-page lettering rate and the $6-a-page writing rate as a single $9 writing rate, just so he could pretend he was getting close to double digits for writing. Another artist refused to pencil, only making the roughest blue-pencil layouts before going directly to inks. "At these rates, I'm not drawing anything twice," he told me. It was 1975. He was getting $50 a page for writing, penciling, lettering, and inking. Shortcuts were required.

Low rates attract hacks and cheesy artists. Charlton had its share of both, but whereas the hack jobs were quickly flipped through and dismissed as being such, the cheesy art (by artists with more enthusiasm than actual talent) was lingered over and appreciated for its raw charm. I'd still rather read a story by Tony Tallarico or Paul Reinman than Rob Liefeld or half the modern superstar artists any day of the week.

I don't know what Charlton was paying in 1965, but whatever it was, most of the guys Dick Giordano brought in to bolster the line were working their hearts out for their pittances.

The cheese-artists were still there, toiling away on many of the horror, romance, and war titles, but the super-


April 1, 1975
Paul Kupperberg
282 S. 40th St.
Brooklyn, NY 11211
Dear Paul,
We've accepted "DISTRESS" from the enclosed script for use in SCARY TALES #3 and we're planning to publish it shortly. See you on first page!
The synopsis sound good so do your up in script form and we'll probably take them.
Best regards,
Nicki
Nicola Cuti
Assistant Managing Editor
mc/ek
Enclosure
CHARLTON COMICS
Division of Charlton Publications, Inc. • Derby, Conn. 06418 • Telephone: Derby 735-1321 • New York 246-6917/Tele. No. 963509
CHARLTON MEMBER COMICS MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
DISTRESS
SCARY TALES No. 3, Dec. 1975

Acceptance letter from Charlton assistant editor (and E-Man cocreator) Nick Cuti, for "Distress," Paul's first published story for ***Scary Tales*** #3, with art by Mike Zeck. Letter courtesy of Paul Kupperberg. *Scary Tales* © Charlton Comics Group.

hero line, the Action-Heroes as Dick dubbed them, traveled first class. Ditko, of course, has never been one to give less than 120% to whatever strip he's working on and continued that trend on *Captain Atom*, *The Question*, and *Blue Beetle*. Also: Jim Aparo on *The Phantom*, Nightshade, Wander, and, of course, the beautiful Thane of Bagarth. And Sam Glanzman on *Hercules*. Pete Morisi's *Thunderbolt*. Pat Boyette's exquisitely funky *Peacemaker*, Frank's *Judomaster*, Dick's own *Sarge Steel*. Plus the new writers like Gary Friedrich and Denny O'Neil ("Children of Doom" !). Every one of them I bought, read, and reread endlessly. I still pluck them off the shelf to have a rematch with nostalgia every now and again.

Even after Dick's departure for DC, I didn't abandon Charlton. I always loved *Popeye* and *The Flintstones*, kept up with the *Phantom*, bought their short-lived *Flash Gordon*, and was still there when they hit their licensing strategy of the mid-'70s, with *Space: 1999*, *Emergency!*, and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, featuring art by a mixture of old hands (Neal Adams's Continuity Studios crew, Win Mortimer, Jack Sparling, and others) and young turks, like Joe Staton and John Byrne. They were offering Cuti and Staton's charming *E-Man*, Byrne's post-apocalyptic *Doomsday+1* (heavily rewritten, with the writer's blessing, by John from scripts by Charlton perennial Joe Gill), Wayne Howard's *Midnight Tales*, and Warren Sattler's *House of Yang*.

I snuck in there, too.

IN EARLY 1975, I SENT a five-page script and several plots for horror stories to Charlton editor George Wildman. Many of these same stories had, a couple months earlier, been rejected by Gold Key editor Wally Green. Wally pointed out that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the stories, they just weren't right for his books, and invited me back anytime to pitch again. It was the best first rejection a 19-year-old wannabe writer could get, gentle and instructive and leaving me with spirits uncrushed and hopes undiminished. Those stories were, however, right for Charlton Comics, according to the letter I received from Assistant Managing Editor Nicola Cuti dated April 3, 1975, that simply stated "We've accepted 'DISTRESS' [the full-script]." I was told, "The synopses sound good so do them up in script form and we'll probably take them." They were paying me. Charlton Comics made me, at 19, a professional writer! No check was ever sweeter than that $25 ($5 per page!) that followed about a week later.

I sold Charlton a grand total of six scripts, starting with "Distress," the aforementioned five-pager about a soldier of fortune hired to rescue the girl atop the mountain, only to learn that it was just a way to lure him in to *feed* the girl, who was a vampire. Mike Zeck, himself a relative newbie to the business, drew it and did so, as you may imagine, quite handsomely. I showed that first story to Steve Brodner, a political cartoonist friend (not in comics or a comics reader), and I remember him commenting on the craft in the execution of the art, not just in Mike's story but in the entire book. Even the stories of inferior quality to Mike's had value, representing to his noncomic–reader's eye a stylistic choice rather than the fannish value judgment that makes one have to compare Nicholas and Alascia with Adams and Giordano. Steve took each creator on his own terms, a way of looking at any artistic endeavor that I took to heart and a point of view to which I wish more people would adhere.

After that came "That Personal Touch" by Nicholas and Alascia in *Ghostly Tales* #120; "Hanging Offense," art

*A **full house:*** Paul's five Charlton appearances after ***Scary Tales*** #3: "That Personal Touch," art by Charles Nicholas and Vince Alascia, ***Ghostly Tales*** #120 (Mar. 1976); "Sleep of Ages," art by Steve Ditko (cover story), ***Ghostly Haunts*** #52 (Oct. 1976); "Hanging Offense," art by Recreo (cover story), ***Creepy Things*** #5 (Apr. 1976); "The Haunted Bookshop," art by Don Perlin, ***Haunted*** #30 (Nov. 1976); "Voodoo Doll," art by Nicholas and Alascia, ***Ghost Manor*** #28 (Mar. 1976). © Charlton Comics Group.

THE HAUNTED BOOK SHOP
THE BOSS TOLD US TO DO WHATEVER YOU SAY, SO I'LL DO EXACTLY THAT. OOOH.
YOU WARNED US THAT THERE WOULD BE TROUBLE IF WE DIDN'T LET IT!
HEY, PARTY GOING ON! A PLACE TO EAT, DRINK, DANCE... WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?
CRASH!
SMASH!

by Recreo (the cover story) in *Creepy Things* #5; "Voodoo Doll" by Nicholas and Alascia in *Ghost Manor* #28; "Sleep of Ages" in *Ghostly Haunts* #52 by Ditko (also a cover story, that cover painted by Pat Boyette . . . I was in heaven when I first saw that issue, plucked from the rack of the candy store on Nostrand Avenue and Avenue J where I was waiting for the bus to take me to classes at Brooklyn College); and my Charlton swan song, "The Haunted Bookshop" by Don Perlin in *Haunted* #30.

There's not a single thing in any of these stories you haven't read before. They're all straight O. Henry twist endings that anyone paying half a mind could see coming from a mile away. A lot like many of the other tales in the Charlton books, but it's the type of stuff you write when you're either young and inexperienced or they're not paying you enough to think beyond clichés and retreads. In my case, it was inexperience; I was writing the best I could at the time, it's just that at 19 there's not a whole lot of experience to draw on to give a five- or six-page horror story any depth. That would come with time; 38 years later, I'm still working at it. For a lot of the rest, they weren't writing *War and Peace* at five bucks a page. It was a volume business, and how many different ways are there to fit a story around the same EC or *Twilight Zone*–inspired twist ending? Let us flip through Charlton's horror line and count the ways.

My heart never strayed far from Charlton even if my typewriter and I did. In the summer of 1975 I began selling to DC Comics. It was their *fifteen* bucks a page versus Charlton's five. How could I afford to write for them when I could earn three times as much doing a script for DC?! Little did I know.

Much as I was anxious to play with DC's toys (Superman! . . . although it would be years before anyone let me anywhere near him), Charlton had something the other companies didn't: managerial apathy! Charlton was run by businessmen who ran printing presses and delivered printed material to retail outlets. All they cared about was that those presses not be idle and that those delivery trucks be filled. If comic books kept them running and they could make a few bucks off the finished product, then comic books it was. They could give a fig what was in them. Maybe, from time to time, the editors cared, but for large chunks of its history, Charlton was a hands-off kind of operation. They recognized they paid squat. They knew beggars couldn't be choosers and, the odd ducks like Ditko aside (and I've recently learned that according to Nick Cuti and George Wildman, Steve was receiving a "substantially" higher rate than everybody else but Pat Boyette), they knew they weren't going to attract choice talent. But the odd ducks were there *because* it was a hands-off operation. Talents like Ditko, who never fit the mold, could go there and do their work in peace and without editorial interference. Ditko always had Charlton as a safe haven. When he got tired of Stan Lee receiving all the credit for what was, dialog aside, essentially *his* creation, when he found DC was run by businessmen nowhere as noble as those supreme individuals idealized in the work of philosopher Ayn Rand, he always had Charlton to go home to.

(Just to be clear: I don't attempt to speak for Ditko's beliefs, past or present, or possess any personal knowledge or special insight; I'm merely repeating the common currency on him as pertains to my memories. Steve Ditko is a very private individual whose work and—rare in comics—willingness to take a moral stand against the best interests of his wallet I admire greatly.)

It wasn't a question of page rate; it was a question of the work. At Charlton, they let you do the work your way. At Marvel, everyone drew like Jack Kirby. At DC, Curt Swan was the model. At Charlton, there was room for everyone from traditional superhero artists like Don Newton and

John Byrne to individual stylists like Pat Boyette and Tom Sutton.

I DID MY LAST WRITING for Charlton in 1975—although in retrospect I wish I had continued working for them; the money wasn't much, but it was another market and, who knows, I might have graduated from short stories to book length—but I haven't seemed to ever be able to shake its influence on my life. I can't go very far without some Charlton legacy cropping up. It can be something as small as running into a fellow alum at a convention or in my day-to-day work life . . . or anywhere in the rest of my life. At random:

The first story I sold to DC was a 10-page backup that appeared in *Superman Family* #182 (Mar.-Apr. 1977), a "Fabulous World of Krypton" tale called "The Stranger" (featuring pencils by fellow comics newbie Marshall Rogers and inks by industry legend Frank Springer). The editor was Denny O'Neil, "Sergius O'Shaughnessy" to us old Charlton hands. Starting in the late '60s when Dick Giordano brought him (and some of his other Action Hero cohorts) over to DC, Denny's left several indelible marks on the industry as well as the comics themselves. His journalistic approach to storytelling was revelatory in the 1960s and continued to grow and show the rest of us how it should be done. For many years, I was an editor on staff at DC while Denny was one of three Group Editors (with Archie Goodwin and Mike Carlin), and he would give regular "classes" to staff members on the art of storytelling, many of which senior and experienced staffers and freelancers would also sit in on. Which is entirely understandable, as Mr. O'Neil has quite literally written the book on writing comics: *The DC Comics Guide to Writing Comics* (Watson-Guptil, 2001).

The first ongoing series I got to write at DC was *The New Doom Patrol*, which ran in *Showcase* #94–96 in 1977. The artist on that was Joe Staton, who to this day hasn't forgiven me because one of those stories featured a Russian villain called the Cossack, who rode a winged horse (stop it! I was young, inexperienced, and totally clueless; besides, your mockery couldn't possibly sting any deeper than my endless embarrassment). Joe did not then nor does he now like drawing horses, feeling he doesn't do it particularly well. And while Joe is no Bruno Premiani (the original Doom Patrol artist who in his native Italy in 1957, ironically, wrote *El Caballo, the* book on drawing horses), his winged horse was certainly sufficient. But every time I call Joe (which I often do; he's one of my favorite go-to guys when someone's paying me to be an editor and I can hire guys to draw stuff) or see him, he twits me about "horsies." At the 2008 NY Comicon, my 12-year-old walked up to Joe with his sketchbook and asked him for a sketch of a horse. Joe tried, but without reference the end result was a cross between Scooby Doo and . . . something vaguely mammalian and perhaps even equine. Max, who also has in that book a Joe Kubert Sgt. Rock, three Neal Adams (Batman, Green Lantern, Green Arrow), a Byrne, a Gene Colan Howard the Duck, and a Mort Walker Beetle Bailey (to name but a few) has declared the Joe Staton "horsey" sketch his favorite piece of all.

Nick Cuti and I were at DC at the same time, me a freelancer haunting the halls and bothering the editors (back in the days when you could still do that kind of thing; now you need to be escorted in and out and have a keycard to get through doors). Nick was quite simply one of the good guys, as well as a creative writer and artist and a respected editor. Nick would often shake his head in despair at some of my antics and mutter regrets that he brought me into the business. Don Thompson, the late spouse of Maggie Thompson and, with her, an influential fanzine publisher in the early 1970s when Paul Levitz and I got into the zine biz, often had the same reaction, as it was his capsule review of our first real fanzine, *Etcetera*, in 1971 that launched us and got the first subscriptions rolling in. In his heart, I think Don was proud of us—he'd just never say it to our faces.

In 1991, I left the freelance life behind and went to work at DC as an editor. One of the first books I was handed to edit was *Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt*, written and penciled by Mike Collins. I was vaguely aware of Mike's work from the British comic magazine *2000 AD*, which features Judge Dredd and countless other characters, but we "met" over the telephone, where I learned that, like me, Mike was a true Charlton buff. Though born and raised in England (in a little town called West Bromwich, also the birthplace, coincidentally, of John Byrne) and long a resident of Wales, where they spell things funny, Mike knows his American funny books. Plus, he's a talented writer and a really fine artist.

So we launched *Thunderbolt*. Mike was very faithful to Pete (PAM) Morisi's original take, updating but not changing the essentials of the character and his situation. I enjoyed the book, working with its creators (including inker Jose Marzan, Jr., who in 2008 won an Eisner for inking *Y: The Last Man*), the connection to an old Charlton favorite . . . and the fact that one day, my phone rang and when I answered it, the voice on the other end said, "Hi, Paul, my name's Pete Morisi. Dick Giordano said I should talk to you. I'm the guy who created Thunderbolt."

I was flabbergasted. Pete Morisi. PAM! On my telephone! Talking. To *me*!

I don't hide the fact that I am still a fan at heart. The greatest thing about being where I've been is the fact that it's put me so close to so many of the idols of my childhood. I was *friends* with Julie Schwartz, for crying out loud! (No, you don't understand . . . it was the '60s, I'm a kid reading comics and all the best and my favorites are Schwartz's books—*Justice League of America*, *The Flash*, *Batman*, *Detective*—and now we're *friends*!!) My stories have been drawn by guys like Curt Swan, Steve Ditko, Carmine Infantino, Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Joe Orlando, Ross Andru, Kurt Schaffen-

Superman Family #182 featured Paul's first DC Comics story (the cover-blurbed "Wonder World of Krypton"), edited by Denny (Sergius O'Shaughnessy) O'Neil. TM & © DC Comics.

Evolution of a Charlton character:

- ***Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt*** #2 (Oct. 1992), cover by Mike Collins and Jose Marzan, Jr. © DC Comics.
- **Pete Morisi's** 1980s updated origin of his creation, originally intended for an issue of DC's ***Secret Origins***. From a copy of the original art.
- **T-bolt revived: *Peter Cannon: Thunderbolt*** #1 (Sept. 2012, variant cover). Thunderbolt TM & © Dynamite Characters LLC.

berger, Irv Novick, George Evans, Dick Ayers, George Tuska, Jerry Grandenetti, Win Mortimer, Gray Morrow, Jim Aparo, Don Heck, Dick Giordano . . . and that's not even mentioning some of the newfangled guys, like Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez, Adam Kubert, Kyle Baker, Mike Mignola, John Byrne, Frank Miller, Howard Chaykin, and others I've worked with. But to this very day, when I walk up to someone like Neal Adams, Joe Kubert (Joe was my editor on *Arion, Lord of Atlantis* for about a year; I mean—how cool is *that*!!!) or Murphy Anderson, and *they know my name*, I am, inside, a quivering mass of fanboy jelly vibrating at a frequency guaranteed to transport me to Earth-2. These guys were my heroes, the people who could put pencil or pen to paper and create a comic book. I wanted to be there with them.

So you can imagine my reaction on hearing that yet another one of those heroes was calling me. I stammered a stunned hello and he said, in an accent so tough-guy New York I thought I was back in Canarsie and about to get beat up again, "Dick tells me *you're* the editor of the new *Thunderbolt* book."

Uh-oh. Original creator . . . hapless newbie editor of a revival that original creator isn't involved with . . . Was I in trouble?

But Pete said, "You guys are doin' a nice job with the book. Thanks for taking care of the 'Bolt."

I spoke with Pete a few times over the phone, not about anything specific, just in general. He was reading the book and would call now and then with a comment or suggestion. It was always a pleasure to hear from him and, in the process, I'd manage to finagle a story or two out of him about his career in comics or as a cop with the N.Y.P.D., or we'd talk about our shared ancestral homeland, Brooklyn, especially his memories of it, predating mine by some 30 years. The high point came when I finally met Pete face to face at a lunch hosted by Dick Giordano at the Society of Illustrators club in Manhattan (where, on the way in, I ran into my illustrator friend Steve Brodner—the one who had been so impressed with the art in the issue of *Scary Tales* that featured my first story—then an officer of the Society, helping hang a new exhibit in the gallery; just another Charlton-synchronistic moment in my life).

The lunch was great. Pete told cop stories and about how he had joined the cops in the first place because comics were dying out from under him and he needed a steady income to support his family. He told comic book stories, before the N.Y.P.D. and after, when he first adopted the "PAM" pseudonym because it was against regulations for police officers to moonlight. He talked at length about how much he—and damned near everyone else in comics at the time—admired the work of George Tuska so much that he went to the artist and asked permission to emulate his style. George said it was fine by him. (George drew a number of my scripts over the years, including a *Masters of the Universe* miniseries for DC and several months of the *Superman* syndicated newspaper comic strip when I took it over.) He told the obviously oft-repeated—but once you heard Pete tell it, you understand why—story of his reaching across the desk of sleazy comic book publisher Victor Fox and lifting the man by his shirtfront in an effort to convince Fox he should pay Pete the money due him. Pete was a large, beefy Irishman. Victor Fox was, as I hear it, not. "Nobody else got paid," Pete said. "I left that office with a check in my pocket, but, oh, I cashed it fast."

After our twelve-issue run and various appearances by

the character over the next several years (including the story "Havoc Unleashed" in *Justice League Quarterly* #14, reuniting Captain Atom, Thunderbolt, Blue Beetle, Nightshade, and Judomaster to battle 'Bolt's foe, Havoc, written by me and drawn by Mike Collins and Eduardo Baretto, with a great poster-shot cover of the heroes by Mike Mignola), the rights to Peter Cannon—Thunderbolt reverted to its creator.

THAT WASN'T MY FIRST experience writing the Charlton characters. In the early1980s, DC was planning to experiment with a weekly comic book. (Weekly comic books?!? That's insanity. It'll never happen!) I was assigned to write the Captain Atom feature, starting from scratch with his origin. I wrote a dozen scripts, the chapters starting off at six pages but then going down to four per. The first script credits Rick Hoberg as penciler, although by the last one, Jose Delbo was on deck to be drawing the feature. The plug was pulled on the weekly and I don't know if any of my scripts were ever drawn, but at least I got the opportunity to write Captain Atom, Charlton's cornerstone Action-Hero character!

Robert Greenberger, editor of what was to be titled *Comics Cavalcade Weekly*, remembers a different artist attached to Atom: "There was you and Denys Cowan on Captain Atom, although Paul Chadwick also took a stab at the feature, but I don't think you wrote his." (I didn't.) "We had PAM on Thunderbolt and he did several weeks' worth of his contribution. Keith Giffen and Bob Fleming had almost the entire first storyline for their Peacemaker feature done when the plug was pulled. Mike W. Barr and Stan Woch tried to solve The Question, and Steve Englehart wrote the Blue Beetle, which was being penciled by both Deryl Skelton and Chas Truog. Dave Gibbons did me a favor and drew the cover. While we had planned it, the Superman feature for the book was never started." (Cowan and I finally did wind up doing Captain Atom together years later, in 1986's *DC Comics Presents* #90.)

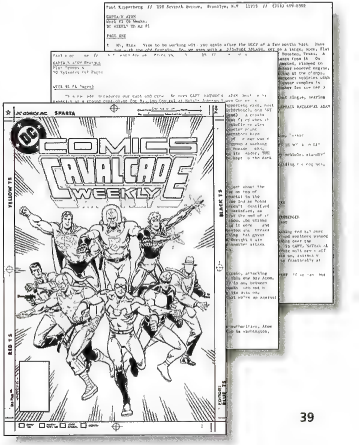
Jose Delbo, a frequent DC Comics collaborator, is another Charlton alumnus, including on *Billy the Kid*, from #58 (Nov. 1966) through #110 (Dec. 1974), an impressive run. In addition to being talented, Jose is also a sweetheart of a guy. The Argentinean-born artist would always greet me when we saw each other at DC with a massive and beatific smile, wide-stretched arms, and a booming, "Hello, my friend!" I can't even begin to count the number of stories we did together, from the Jimmy Olsen feature in *Superman Family* to the syndicated *Superman* newspaper strip, to which Jose was assigned when Tuska left, to random issues of *DC Comics Presents*. I always admired his clean line, spot-on storytelling, and dynamic action, and welcomed working with him any time, on any project.

Around 2000, my family was vacationing in Boca Raton (because that's what Jews do) and we visited Mort Walker's comic art museum, which was then in residence there. I was surprised to see that attached to the museum was something called the Cartoon Camp . . . *Delbo's* Cartoon Camp, to be exact! Unfortunately, the camp wasn't in session and Jose wasn't around, and it wasn't till several years later that I received a call from Jose at home after having corresponded with his daughter online to send her father my regards.

Jose, then as now, runs his Cartoon Camp for kids (**www.cartooncamp.com**), and I can't think of a better man for the job than this gentle soul. We caught up on our lives. It was great to hear from him, and as we were saying our goodbyes, Jose told me in his heavy Spanish accent, "Remember, if you ever want to speak to someone with a *Brooklyn* accent, just give me a call!"

Peacemaker ("He loves peace so much, he's willing to kill for it!") was reintroduced to the DCU as a psychotic killing machine controlled by the voices of those he's killed, which reside in his helmet. (I forget if that was my concept or Keith Giffen's, but it's nothing either of us should be proud of.) As does the voice of his dead Nazi father, who had committed suicide in front of him when he was boy. Sure, a bit *off* the trail first blazed by Pat Boyette, but it was the grim-and-gritty 1980s and that was they way we rolled back in the day. Tod Smith drew the four-issue *Peacemaker* miniseries and then the character was ported over to the pages of *Vigilante*, which I was also writing, where he could amp up the psycho as he tried to compete for craziest bastard in the book.

Peacemaker (and Vigilante) were both a bit off my own previously blazed trail as a writer. I was the guy who wrote Superman and Supergirl and other standard, squeaky clean, nonbloody superheroes. I'd be lying if I told you writing off-the-rail psychotic characters wasn't fun; it was. Lots. I did feel a little guilty about messing with Boyette's core concept, but it was a different time, and besides, if ever a character had the potential for going off the rails, it was Peacemaker. I never met or spoke with Boyette, but our paths crossed twice, first when he did the painting for a cover-featured story of mine in *Ghostly Haunts*, and again in 1984 when I did my (till then) one and only job for Archie Comics (not counting a pair of custom comics I wrote for Radio Shack around 1980), the script for *Blue Ribbon Comics* #15, a book-length adventure of Cat-Girl, a Sheena wannabe jungle adventure. The

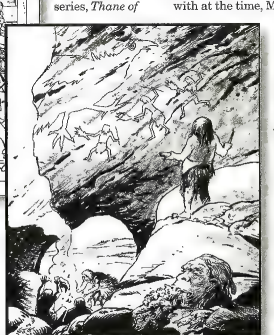


Dave Gibbons's cover to the approved but never published ***Comics Cavalcade Weekly***, to feature a lineup headlined by Superman with the DC-owned Charlton Action-Heroes; pages from Paul's unpublished Captain Atom plot synopsis and script for the first issue. © DC Comics.

issue would have carried a cover date of February 1985. I know because even though the story was never published (*BRC* ended with #14), I have photocopies of the cover and the art . . . by *Pat Boyette*! Out of several unpublished stories across my career, this is one I wish to this day could have seen print.

IN THE ORIGINAL DRAFT of this article, I wrote about my friendship with Dick Giordano, but since that section's already seen print (Michael excerpted it for *Spotlight* #7's Giordano tribute), I'll just refer you there. Suffice to say Dick was a remarkable artist, one of the best executives a put-upon editorial staff could hope to serve under, and another of the world's good people, now sorely missed.

I wrote that even after Dick's retirement from DC, I would call him with work for everything from custom comics to an illustration for an issue of *Weekly World News* (a tabloid of fake, funny news, creator of Bat Boy and instigator of the "Elvis Sighting" and Bigfootmania, a.k.a. "the world's only reliable newspaper"). My time as executive editor (2006–07) of *WWN* also gave me an excuse to contact another Charlton graduate, Sam Glanzman. A week before I found myself in need of someone to illustrate an article on giant prehistoric turkeys, I had picked up a cheap black-and-white reprint published by ACG Comics called *Warriors* that was credited "With Art by Sam Glanzman" and graced with a clip from his Charlton *Hercules* series. Inside reprinted the run of what was one of my favorite Charlton titles of its time! Best $10.95 I spent at the comic shop that week. *Hercules* was a great adventure title and tried to keep true to the spirit of the legends of the mythic strongman, and I was just as taken with the stories now as I was then. Now if only they'd reprint Aparo's stunning sword-and-sorcery series, *Thane of Bagarth!* Sam, needless to say, did an amazing job, giving me a beautiful illustration of cavemen decorating their walls with paintings of the giant turkey hunt.



Above: Pat Boyette's cover for Archie Comics' unpublished ***Blue Ribbon Comics*** #15. TM & © 2013 Archie Comics. ***Right:*** Illustration by Charlton veteran Sam Glanzman commissioned for the Nov. 27, 2006, issue of ***Weekly World News***. © 2013 Weekly World News.

Speaking of Aparo, I gushed to him of my love of *Thane* (and damned near everything else the man ever drew) in the early '90s, when I met him in person for the only time at a Chicago comic convention (we spoke on the phone several times in later years, when he did some custom comics work for me at DC). He was sitting at the DC table, signing and meeting fans, when I went over and introduced myself. I mentioned he had drawn a story of mine, a Batman–Lois Lane team-up (in *Brave and the Bold* #175, 1981), and he said with a smile, "Oh, I remember that story. The villain was Metallo, right?" Needless to say I was stunned. This had been a one-off story, drawn a dozen years earlier, but Jim remembered. I became a bigger fan than ever.

I also knew Vinnie Colletta ever so slightly from my younger days as assistant P.R. director at DC in 1977 when he was the company's art director. Vinnie's one of the more interesting people I've met in this business. Alas, try as I might, I can't come up with a single reminiscence of the man suitable for a family publication. Unless it's the Corleone family! (>Rimshot!< But I wanna tell you . . . !) Vinnie liked to hint that he was "connected"; to this day I don't know whether he was or not (if anything, likely he hung on the fringes), but it made for interesting stories and *very* interesting visitors to his office at DC, just up the corridor from the cubicle where I was parked. If you ever see me at a convention, buy me a beer and I'll tell you some Vinnie Colletta stories. But don't ask me to explain why he owned a fried chicken joint in Hell's Kitchen. That one still baffles me.

I've been fortunate enough to have Steve Ditko draw *two* of my scripts, not only that early horror story in *Ghostly Haunts* but also a later Legion of Super-Heroes story at DC. In the mid-'90s I was editing the Jack Kirby New Gods franchise which, at the moment, John Byrne was writing and drawing. But he was scheduled to finish his run soon, at which point Walt Simonson was to take over the characters. To help Walt get ahead on his deadlines, we decided each issue would have a 17-page lead story and a 5-page backup. I commissioned some stories, including one from the relatively new young writer I'd been working with at the time, Mark Millar. Mark's a Brit but he grew up on American comics and can hold his own with anyone on the subject. His story "Infinitely Gentle, Infinity Suffering" was a nice little tale of Desaad and Granny Goodness competing to see who could give Darkseid the best gift; Granny wins when she offers her dark master the absolute despair of his subjects. Mark asked me if I could get Steve Ditko to draw it. Hey, I could make the call! Steve said yes, I said I could send him the script, he said would it be okay if he came by and picked it up? He lived only a few blocks away. I allowed as how that could be arranged.

Come the day, I've got script, voucher, deadline form, Bristol board, and reference all together to greet Steve. I get him at reception, we shake hands, I take him back in, he has a seat. We chat in the most mundane how have you been, fine weather we're having way, then we get down to business. I give him the script,

I'M SORRY, MR. BYRNE, BUT I'M AFRAID I'M NOT ALLOWED TO DISCUSS...
I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO DISCUSS ANYTHING. I'M TELLING YOU.

© 2013 Ron Frantz

RON FRANTZ

Charlton Memories

Alex Toth:

An Eclectic View from Down the Road

Sometimes I wonder whether, if you could sneak up on one of the men who are held up before the eyes of the world as successful businessmen, scientists, artists or what not, you would not discover that beneath the outward mask of success he wears a surprisingly disgruntled and twisted look; whether he might not be found dreaming disconsolately, like anyone else, of what might have been, painfully exhuming old aspirations which he had one by one sentenced to death, wondering if there was any market where one might barter fame for good digestion and turn bank balances into a recipe for happiness.

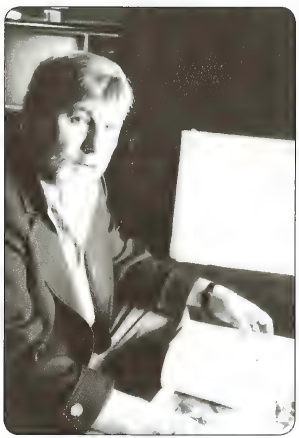
—Douglas Fairbanks, *One Reel of Autobiography*

WHEN SILENT FILM STAR Douglas Fairbanks penned those melancholy words for the June 18, 1921, issue of *Collier's* magazine, he was said to be one of the two best-known men in the world. Although some might question such a modest claim, his words are enough to make me wonder if being rich or famous is all it's cracked up to be. Fairbanks made his fortune in the motion picture business and probably had all the worldly possessions a man could possibly want; but apparently neither fame nor fortune was enough for him to find true happiness. Kind of a shame when you think about it. His musings bring to mind a friend who seemed to have a similar outlook on life . . . the late Alex Toth.

I'm sure some of you must be curious why I'm writing about Toth for *Charlton Spotlight*. After all, Toth did so little work for Charlton that it can be enumerated on the fingers of one hand. I can only tell you that I would never have launched my ACE Comics line in 1986 had I not met and become friends with Alex Toth, and there would be very few memories for me to share about the interesting people who once worked at Charlton that I met along the way: Pat Boyette, Pete Morisi, Dick Giordano, Joe Gill, Frank McLaughlin, and Steve Ditko. If I had lasted a little longer in the publishing business, I could have added a few more names to the list. I would have liked nothing better than to have worked with Jim Aparo, Tony Tallarico, Bill Montes, or Sam Glanzman. I'm sorry I never had the chance.

My story begins in December 1977, when I first met Toth at the Oklahoma City airport. This initial meeting quickly turned into an awkward situation, and our friendship almost ended before it had a chance to begin. Toth had accepted an invitation to be guest of honor at the annual Wintercon sponsored by the Oklahoma Alliance of Fans (OAF). This happened to be the first year I worked as a con cochair, usually sharing the workload with Robert Brown and Ed Baldwin. I never made a dime for any of my time and effort, but I sure had a lot of fun doing it. I must have been a glutton for punishment because I stayed on the job until 1983, when the convention sort of quietly faded away.

Come Thursday afternoon the dealers' room was already a beehive of activity. You couldn't walk ten feet without seeing money changing hands or a rapid-fire trade in progress. Brown and I had to tear ourselves away from all the fun and head out to pick up Toth at the airport. To make a long story short, we were inexcusably late. After getting a late start, we got caught up in bumper-to-bumper rush-hour traffic, which put us further behind schedule. I must admit it was a poor excuse for not being there to meet the plane on time, but that is pretty much the way it happened. When we finally arrived at the airport we could hear a message blaring over the loudspeaker asking that we meet Toth at the information desk. Just to make matters worse, we discovered that Toth's plane had arrived early and he had been kept waiting for almost an hour. Needless to say, he was not a happy man. Viewing us as if we were a pair of practicing ingrates, I think Toth was about one heartbeat away from telling us to go to hell and catching the next plane back to Los Angeles. Under the circumstances, I probably would not have blamed him.



Alex Toth at the 1977 Wintercon. Photo courtesy of and © 2013 Ron Frantz.

The Loveliest of All!
WHAT'S THAT, HONEY? YOU CAN'T FIND ANYTHING TO WEAR?
TERESA'S GOING TO THE BALL TONIGHT, AND SHE'S SO FULL OF HERSELF! BUT THAT'S NOT HELP FOR YOU!
OH, COME ON! I'LL BET TERESA WILL NEVER LOOK AS PRETTY AS YOU AGAIN!

Splash page of Toth's one-off romance story "The Loveliest of All!", from ***My Only Love*** #3 (Nov. 1975). © Charlton Comics Group.

You could almost cut the tension in the air with a knife. I knew right away this was a situation calling for tact and diplomacy, so I let Brown to do most of the talking. After offering a beleaguered apology for our tardiness, we somehow managed to smooth things over a little. Stopping in the hotel bar for a drink probably didn't hurt matters any. My first impression of Toth was that he was a hard-nosed character. Actually, I was not too far wrong. In some ways he reminded me of a favorite old uncle who had a tendency to speak his mind and didn't care much if other people liked it or not, but underneath that rough outer shell he was soft as mush. I think Alex Toth was a lot like that. For some reason I cannot begin to explain now, Toth seemed to take a liking to my wife and me. During the next three days we spent a lot of time visiting in the hotel bar, and somewhere along the way we became friends. I have never quite understood how these things happen; I only know that sometimes they do.

On Saturday night, Toth delivered a speech in the film room and then took a few questions from the audience. Someone in the crowd asked him about having briefly worked with Stan Lee at Marvel Comics about 1965. Toth had penciled one issue of the *X-Men* over Jack Kirby's layouts, which Vince Colletta subsequently inked. Toth didn't seem to care much for Lee or working in the so-called Marvel style. He much preferred working from a tight script; legendary Charlton scribe Joe Gill was one of his favorites. Lee wanted Toth to imitate Kirby's style, and needless to say he did not like doing that. On top of it all, Toth didn't like Colletta's casual approach to inking . . . or the man himself. From what I gather, not many people did. Too bad, really; Colletta did some nice work on Charlton's romance comics in the 1950s and '60s. When he took the time, he could draw pretty girls with the best of them.

I remember asking Toth a "loaded" question: "With the possible exception of your own work, what artist do you admire most?" While his eyes twinkled with good humor, Toth replied, "Come on, Ron . . . give me a break! Who says I admire my own art?" Looking back, I realize I probably embarrassed him a little with that stupid question, but Toth was gracious enough to answer it anyway. He mentioned several artists that I was not familiar with, but I do remember him saying that he very much enjoyed the *Cerebus* stories by Dave Sim. Speaking candidly, he said Sim had a lot of talent and considered him one of the best young artists then working in comics. Coming from Toth, that meant a lot.

Later that evening, when the con activities had quieted down to a roar, about a dozen collectors met with Toth in his hotel room for a question-and-answer session. It went on about half the night. Most of us quietly listened while Toth regaled us with stories about his long and prolific career. At one point in the discussion, Toth mentioned his great admiration for artist/animator Morris "Mo" Gollub, with whom he had worked at the Hanna-Barbera studio. I think Toth was flabbergasted to discover that some of us were familiar with Gollub, mostly from his comic book work at Dell in the 1950s.

Some of the "older" guys in the room, who were then in their late '30s or early '40s, were big EC Comics fans. Naturally they wanted to know all the gory details about Toth working with editor Harvey Kurtzman on *Two-Fisted Tales*. That discussion went on for quite a while. I don't remember too much of it, but Toth did say that had it not been for Kurtzman he might have done a lot more work at EC. His thinking was that Kurtzman had an exalted view of his own abilities and importance, one of those "legend in his own mind" kinds of people.

I think I know how Toth felt. I later met Kurtzman at a 1986 Dallas convention, and I developed an almost instant dislike for the man. Much of it can be attributed to his rude and condescending attitude toward Pat Boyette. We were at a party, and after an informal introduction had been made, Kurtzman looked at Boyette as if he were a derelict. Then he made a snide remark about Pat being one of those lousy "Charlton" artists. No matter what Kurtzman might have thought about Charlton, there was no call for him to say something like that. Boyette was too much of a gentleman to let Kurtzman get under his skin, but that was not the case with me. Having been taught from an early age to respect my elders, I had to bite my lip and walk away; otherwise I was liable to say something I might regret. At the very least, I thought Kurtzman could have used a lesson in basic civility . . . along with a swift boot up the backside.

A few days later I told this story to Jerry De Fuccio, who started out in the comics business in the 1950s working for Kurtzman on *MAD*. We talked about EC on the phone once or twice, and I don't remember him expressing any particular fondness for that time. After hearing my story, all Jerry would say is, "That sounds like something Harvey would say, all right. He can be a difficult man to get along with, but he was a good editor." It's easy for me to understand how a strong-minded fellow like Toth might have had problems working for a jerk like Kurtzman.

The discussion with Toth continued. I had recently picked up a few of the *Zorro* comics Toth had drawn two decades earlier for Dell. I had a few questions to ask him about that. With a big smile on his face, Toth said his involvement with *Zorro* began when his editor at Dell arranged for him to visit the studio where they were filming the TV series for Disney. None of the episodes had aired yet, so it gave Toth an opportunity to make some preliminary sketches and get a feel for drawing the characters. With some amusement, he talked about Guy Williams, who played Zorro. Pulling no punches, he called Williams "the clumsiest SOB I ever saw in my life." According to Toth, Williams could not walk across the set without tripping over his own feet. Anytime Williams had a sword in his hand, those standing close to him moved as far away as possible. When a scene called for Zorro to go into action, the director would yell "Cut!" and a stunt man instantly stepped in to take over. These are the kind of stories most people never get to hear. They are the ones you never forget. I enjoyed every minute of it.

About this time the phone rang. Toth said: "Please excuse me. I've been expecting a call from my wife." While he was talking on the phone, it became evident that Toth was very annoyed about something. When he returned, one of the guys in the room asked what was wrong. Toth shook his head and told us about trading some of his original artwork to a guy in New York for some 1930s Sunday newspaper comic pages. After the trade had been made, Toth's trading partner apparently changed his mind and wanted to cancel the deal. Without asking, he mailed the original art back to Toth and demanded that he instantly return the Sunday pages. A few days later, he wrote Toth a nasty letter telling him that he was a member in good standing of the WSA Program [***Ed. note:*** *WE Seal of Approval*]. He told Toth he had five days to return the Sunday pages or the WSA would hound him to the ends of the earth. Yeah, you bet!

Alex Toth and Ron Frantz at the 1983 Wintercon. Photo courtesy of and © 2013 Ron Frantz.

For those who might not be familiar with the WSA, it was an ersatz version of the Better Business Bureau that specialized in the reporting, investigation, and prosecution of all known mail fraud in fandom. WSA had a reputation for honesty and fair play, and it was a force to be reckoned with for those with a streak of larceny in their souls. If you were around in the 1970s, you probably remember seeing those square WSA membership logos plastered all over the advertising and collectors' journals of the period. [***Ed. note:*** *see Ron's book* FANDOM: Confidential *for the full WSA story; ad on page 49.*]

With a pained expression on his face, Toth said: "When I get home I guess I will have to write WSA and try to straighten out this mess. Do any of you guys know anything about this outfit?" At that point, several people in the room started to chuckle. At first Toth didn't understand what was so funny. Then Robert Brown said, "I don't think you'll have any trouble with the WSA, Alex." When Toth asked why not, Brown pointed a finger directly at me and said, "That's the WSA sitting across from you." Toth seemed a little puzzled. He looked at me and said, "*You* are the WSA?" Actually, I felt a little embarrassed by this unexpected attention. I don't think I was quite who Toth expected to find running the store. Although I had been the administrator of the WSA Program for the past two and a half years, I was only 24 at the time. But that situation was about to change. I had recently announced my resignation to take effect January 1, 1978. I still had a little time left on the clock, so I offered to help if I could.

When Toth told me the name of his trading partner, I instantly knew who he was talking about. This guy had been a thorn in my side since my first day on the job. He was constantly squabbling with someone, usually over something that didn't amount to a hill of beans. Of course, he always expected WSA (me) to do something about it. And to make matters worse, about half the time he instigated the problem himself by doing something stupid. I don't know why it is, but it seems like every group or organization I ever belonged to had at least one resident troublemaker. He was ours. I imagine that when he was in grade school his report cards included remarks like "Johnny needs to learn how to play nice with other children." I doubt he ever did. I put up with his shenanigans for no other reason than he was a personal friend of the founder of the organization. I learned very early in the game that no matter where you go or what you do, you can't avoid political pandering.

I told Toth he had nothing to worry about from the WSA. I assured him that I would contact our miscreant member after the convention and do everything possible to set matters straight. On that note, I suggested we meet the next day and talk it over. For

The second of Toth's two covers for Charlton's ***Real West*** (Apr. 1973). © Charlton Publications.

the moment, at least, I wanted to get back to listening to Toth tell more stories about his career in comics and animation. For me, that was a hell of a lot more fun.

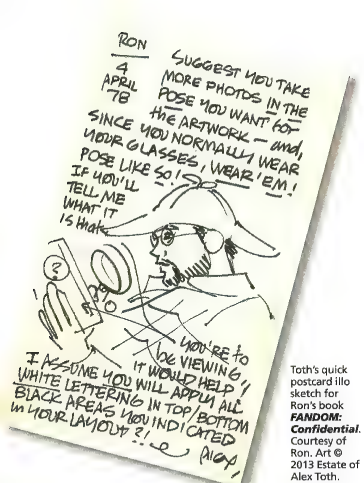
A FEW WEEKS AFTER the convention, when I was free of all the responsibilities that went with running the WSA, I began to correspond with Toth. He was kind enough to introduce me to his friends Pete Morisi and Pat Boyette. Over the next few years I got to know both men very well. I engaged in extensive correspondence with Morisi, which I documented in *Charlton Spotlight* issues 4 and 5. It was a little different with Boyette. He didn't care much for writing letters, so we talked on the phone every month or two. I had no way of knowing at the time, but this was the beginning of the ACE Comics/Charlton connection.

During the next few years I corresponded with Toth on an irregular basis, but in the course of time our exchanges became fewer and more distant. I guess it was easy enough to understand: Toth kept busy doing animation work for Hanna-Barbera while I was pursuing a career in retail management. I asked Toth if he might be willing to do a cover illustration for my upcoming book *FANDOM: Confidential*. Much to my surprise, he agreed to do it. First he asked for some photographs of me for reference. I sent them. He didn't like the first batch. In particular he wanted more close-ups taken from different angles. I had new pictures taken and sent those along. By the time he received them, Toth had to beg off on the job because he suddenly found himself up to his eyeballs in deadlines for H-B. Although I was a little disappointed, there were no hard feelings. Business, after all, is business. As things worked out, I had been corresponding with Pete Morisi for a while, and when I told him what had happened with Toth, he agreed to do a cover illustration for me. Needless to say, I was very pleased with the result. And to think, it only took me 22 years to publish the book. I have often wondered how different it might have looked if Toth had done the cover instead of Morisi. I don't think a cover by Toth would have been any better, just different.

Toth and I renewed our friendship in 1983 when he returned to Oklahoma City for a second Wintercon appearance. It was great to see him again, but I am sad to say that things were not quite the same between us. Toth was nowhere near as cordial as he had been during his previous visit. When I had the chance to talk to him in private, I asked Toth what was bothering him. He kind of let his hair down and told me about some of the personal problems he had been dealing with. Although I am not a psychiatrist (nor do I pretend to be one), I believe Toth was suffering from clinical depression. Pat Boyette, who probably knew Toth better than anyone, shared that opinion. I could say more about it, but that would involve revealing matters of a private nature that were told to me in confidence. It seems best to let this part of the discussion end here.

He did tell me a story about a peculiar incident while he was driving from Los Angeles to Oklahoma City. Toth had veered a little off course to visit Pat Boyette at his home in San Antonio. About the middle of the afternoon, Toth stopped somewhere deep in the heart of Texas to grab a bite to eat. After parking his car, he went in, sat down, and placed his order. While he was waiting for his meal, a local cop walked in. The place was almost empty, but for some reason the cop took an instant dislike to Toth and decided to give him a bad time. He walked up to his table and said, "Hey Bud . . . you need to go move your car." When Toth asked what the problem was, the cop told him his car was illegally parked because one of his tires crossed over the line between spaces in the parking lot. Since the lot was almost empty, Toth couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. At first he thought it had to be some kind of a joke and asked the cop if he was kidding. Then the situation really got ugly. The cop said: "Look. I ain't gonna tell you again! Get your fat ass out of that chair and go move your car, or I am going to arrest you."

When Toth figured out this crazy cop was serious, he didn't say another word. He went out and very carefully reparked his car and then walked back inside to finish his meal. After he had paid the check and was on his way out the door, the cop stopped him and said, "Look, Bud. We


RON
4 APRIL '78
SUGGEST YOU TAKE MORE PHOTOS IN THE POSE YOU WANT FOR THE ARTWORK — and, SINCE YOU NORMALLY WEAR YOUR GLASSES, WEAR 'EM!
POSE LIKE SO!
IF YOU'LL TELL ME WHAT IT IS Huh?
YOU'RE TO LOOK VIEWING IT WOULD HELP
I ASSUME YOU WILL APPLY ALL WHITE LETTERING IN TOP/BOTTOM BLACK AREAS YOU INDICATED IN YOUR LAYOUT?!
AHA!

Toth's quick postcard illo sketch for Ron's book ***FANDOM: Confidential***. Courtesy of Ron. Art © 2013 Estate of Alex Toth.

don't need *your* kind around here. If I were you, I would hit the road and don't look back. If I ever see you again, I'm going to make your life miserable!" I have no idea what his problem was. By my way of thinking, that cop had no business wearing a badge. It's the sort of thing that's bound to give the local tourist trade a real black eye.

Toth was smart enough to keep his temper. He left the premises without so much as a peep. But for the next half-hour he kept checking the rearview mirror just to be sure he wasn't being followed. He didn't relax until he crossed into the next county. When Toth finally got to San Antonio a few hours later, he couldn't wait to tell his story to Boyette. Pat just shook his head and said it was a good thing Toth had kept his mouth shut; otherwise Boyette might have been on his way to that one-horse town to bail him out of jail. When I heard the story several days later, Toth had obviously chilled out. He seemed to think no real harm had been done, and he was ready to forget the whole thing.

IT IS PROBABLY SAFE to say that Toth had a reputation among some editors and art directors for being difficult to work with. No doubt his career suffered for it. Right or wrong, Toth had very definite ideas on how things should be done, and it often became a matter of doing a job his way or not at all. He was known to quarrel with clients over insignificant details, and in the process he managed to burn a lot of bridges. And the sad part is that despite his remarkable talent there were times when he had difficulty finding work.

One of the most telling stories I've heard about the infamous Toth temperament came from Pat Boyette. It would seem that Toth had a falling out with Joe Barbera while he was working on the *Super Friends* TV series for Hanna-Barbera. The details are now a little vague, but apparently Toth became so angry with Barbera that he left the company and vowed to never return. It began when a certain animation director at H-B made a few minor changes on some of Toth's character designs and then tried to pass it off as his own work. Naturally, Toth was not inclined to let a thing like that slide. I assume Barbera had an opportunity to set matters straight but for whatever reason declined to do so. Toth told Barbera and his animation director where they could go and stormed out of the place.

A few years passed, and Barbera called Toth to ask if he would be interested in doing character designs and storyboards for a new H-B series. I guess Barbera figured enough time had passed for Toth to cool down and listen to reason. Apparently this was not the case. Toth rather tersely replied that he would rather starve than work for Barbera and then slammed the phone down in his ear. Not being one to take no for an answer, Barbera called again a few days later. Toth was supposedly even more abrupt the second time around. Not being one to mince words, he ended the conversation by suggesting that Barbera go and do something physically impossible to himself.

Now the story really starts to get interesting. Believe it or not, Joe Barbera actually went to Toth's home and tried to make peace with him. Evidently he wanted Toth to come back in the worst possible way. I'm sure Barbera didn't make a habit of doing that. But for whatever reason Toth was not the least bit interested. He had made up his mind as far as H-B was concerned and absolutely nothing in the world was going to change it. Much to his chagrin, Barbera came to the realization that there was nothing he could say or do that would make any difference to Toth. The visit came to a premature end when Toth told Barbera to "Get the hell off of my property!" and slammed the door in his face. There was certainly no mistaking his intentions. Barbera had no choice but to call it a day and start looking for someone else to do the job. I imagine he did not have to look very far, as all he had to do was snap his fingers and two dozen cartoonists would come running. They would have been falling over one another trying to get there first.

I once asked Doug Wildey, the former animation director on the *Jonny Quest* TV series, what it was like working with Toth. The question seemed to cause Wildey some discomfort. In fact, he really did not want to talk about it at all. Finally, after some gentle prodding from me, Wildey said what was on his mind: "Alex Toth is a genius! He is the best artist that has ever worked in comics or animation. He can do it all, and he can do it better than almost anyone else. He is in a class by himself . . . but let me tell you, Toth is a gawd-damned pain in the ass to work with! You could not pay me enough to ever work with him again."

I will admit that those are strong-sounding words, but I think Wildey expressed his honest opinion about Toth. And that's all he would say about it. I don't know what happened between Wildey and Toth to have caused such hard feelings, but it must have been serious for it to leave such a sour taste in Wildey's mouth. Since both men are gone now, I guess we will never know the true story. Maybe it's just as well.

IN *CHARLTON SPOTLIGHT #7* I talked about having dinner with Dick Giordano in 1983. Space limitations didn't allow me to tell the full story. It included this anecdote: About a year and a half earlier, Toth was apparently down on his luck. He called Giordano and told him he was

looking for work. Giordano had always been an admirer of Toth's art, but every time he previously tried to work with him it ended badly. Based on past experience, Giordano's first thought was to tell Toth to look elsewhere. But the trouble with nice guys like Giordano is they tend to let sentiment interfere with good judgment. I know how it is, as I have done it more times that I would care to admit. And most of the time (as you might expect) the decision came back to haunt me. Although every instinct warned Giordano to hang up, he decided it wouldn't hurt to listen to what Toth had to say.

I guess Toth's cupboard was getting bare, and he almost pleaded with Giordano for a chance to do some work for DC. Giordano said Toth's voice almost had an air of desperation to it. Giordano found it difficult to turn his back on him. He said, "Alex, I would like to give you some work, but if you remember, every time we worked together in the past it ended in disaster. I don't want to go through that again. If we do this, I want your promise not to cause me any trouble."

As if he were taking a solemn vow, Toth promised to behave himself: "I will draw whatever you send me. I won't complain or make any changes to the script. I will get the job done on time." On that note, Giordano promised to send Toth a script. It came with the understanding that any future work would depend on how well this job turned out. It was almost as if he were putting Toth on probation. Since Giordano did not want to burden any of his junior editors with any possible temper tantrums from Toth, he agreed to edit the material himself. As I recall, Giordano sent Toth a Green Lantern script. When he got the art back from Toth, Giordano could not have been happier with the result. Toth did a great job and there had not been the slightest hint of trouble.

Next came a Superman script. Toth really knocked himself out on that one. Sadly, after that, Toth started slipping back into his old habits. He returned a ghost story to Giordano, claiming it was too badly written for him to bother with. Giordano shrugged and sent him something else. Toth returned that one too, with a note that he had "no intention of drawing that kind of crap! Surely you can find something better than this you can send me?" At that point Giordano decided to call it a day. As editorial director at DC, he had a business to run, and he had neither the time nor the inclination to put up with Toth's changing moods. Even so, he felt bad about it. After listening to Giordano tell the story, I told him he had nothing to feel sorry about. Under the circumstances, he did more than most editors would have to help an artist who was down on his luck.

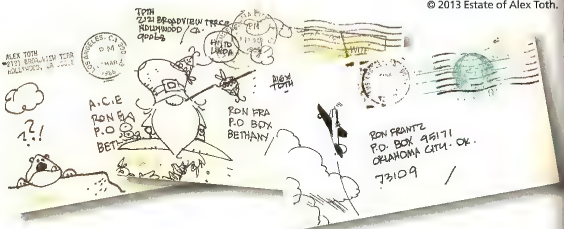
A FEW YEARS LATER, I discovered firsthand that working with Toth could be an exercise in patience, if not futility. While I was busy publishing my ACE Comics line, Steve Ditko had drawn the first two issues of *The FACE*, inked by Frank McLaughlin. When the third issue rolled around, Frank had to bow out because he had taken on more than he could handle by helping Giordano ink John Byrne on a new Superman series. Frank had to take the job because DC paid much higher rates than I could, but his timing could not have been worse. I had to find a replacement in a hurry. I was not having much luck. It seemed like everyone I talked to was either too busy or simply not interested in inking Ditko. At one point I even considered giving the job to a local advertising artist who had never worked in comics. I was getting that desperate.

Then Pat Boyette happened to mention that Toth had not been working much of late following the death of his wife. In fact, he was going through a spell when he did not want to leave his house. Anything he needed, like groceries or medicine, he had delivered. From what I understand this went on for quite some time. Boyette, who talked to Toth almost every day on the phone, told him about my predicament. Surprisingly, Toth thought it might be fun to ink a Ditko story and suggested that I give him a call. To say the least, the idea of teaming two legends like Ditko and Toth was almost mind-boggling. I wasted no time calling Toth. While we talked about the possibility of his inking Ditko, Toth seemed to be in a good mood and said that he was anxious to get started. However, as things worked out Ditko

Toth's action-packed cover for ***What Is the Face*** #3 (Aug. 1987). From the printer's color key proof. The Face TM & © Ron Frantz/ACE Comics, Inc.

needed about two more weeks before he could finish the story. While we were waiting, Toth had a change of heart. After seeing Ditko's pencils, he told me he no longer wanted to do the job. His proffered explanation was that there was too much contrast between his style and Ditko's.

Of course I didn't agree. I spent about an hour on the phone with Toth trying to get him to change his mind. For a good while, he seemed to waver back and forth. Toth said, "Maybe I can do the job if I were to redraw a lot of it." I told him that was not a problem. I encouraged him to do the job any way he wanted. He would get no argument from me. Then he decided he wouldn't do that because it wouldn't be fair to Ditko. With a growing sense of frustration, I tried to convince him that Ditko wouldn't care. I even offered to give him Ditko's phone number so he could so talk to him directly. Finally, after a lot of chatter that seemed to be going nowhere, Toth suggested he do a cover for me instead. Actually it might have worked out for the best, because Toth produced a beautiful color cover for *The FACE* #3.



An assortment of Toth postcards, courtesy of Ron. © 2013 Estate of Alex Toth.

During this time I had been giving some serious thought to publishing *The Skyman*. Jerry De Fuccio seemed to think that Ditko's art had been a major factor for the poor sales on *The FACE* and suggested that a change of artist might help. For whatever reason, Jerry simply did not care for Ditko's art and could not understand why I was using him. I was very fond of Jerry, but at moments like this he had a tendency to get on my nerves. Jerry seemed to think that Toth was the only artist in the entire world that could do justice to the Skyman. Initially there was some discussion between us about De Fuccio writing the script. For these reasons, I considered using Toth instead of Ditko on *Skyman*. While this was going on, DC caused me some minor aggravation by announcing their plans to change the name of their Star-Spangled Kid character to "Skyman." Naturally, I was just a little concerned. Then I received the following letter from Toth:

"Just had a phone chat with Pat Boyette and heard about DC's intent to do their own Skyman book (if it is public domain). So let the battle lines be drawn. It must be a shock to you, at this late date to be compromised by DC. Good luck! Meanwhile (and prior to this news) I'm not sure about my wanting to draw the strip in updated 80's form, which was De Fuccio's idea. We've not discussed it at all, by the way—or even if I ought to tangle with it at all? If I did do it, I'd revise his costume details a bit without affecting its integrity, and write it a la Whitney, as I did with the Fox, for Archie Comics in '83."

I never quite understood why DC's plan to use the Skyman name should have concerned Toth one way or the other. Maybe he knew something I didn't. Meanwhile, I told him that I'd discussed the matter at length with Dick Giordano, who in turn talked to DC's legal department. Giordano assured me that DC had no problem with my using the name. However, I was completely unsuccessful in convincing Toth of that fact. Oh well. Somehow, it didn't seem to matter. I liked Toth well enough that I was not about to let his stubbornness upset me. A few weeks later, Toth wrote again: "Without rights to the title Skyman, you've little cause to pursue updating the nameless character. Chalk off your loss to experience, or lack of same, and start from scratch with totally new original titles/characters/format/stories and have a fresh start."

If I have learned any one thing in life, it is that friendship and business usually mix together about as well as oil and water. It has been my experience that if you do business with a friend—and then expect more out of him than you would of anyone else—you are bound to be disappointed. This being the case, I deemed it best not to pursue a working relationship with Toth. I could tell that we were on a collision course, and I think he felt the same way. Later on I made that mistake with other people and it usually cost me a friendship. I'm glad it didn't happen with Toth.

DESPITE ALL THE STORIES you may have read or heard that picture Toth in an unflattering light (including some in this article), I am thoroughly convinced that they do an injustice to the man. I'm not going to imply that these stories are not true, because many of them are. But I know there was another side to him that not too many people were fortunate enough to see. There is no doubt in my mind that, if he were so inclined, Toth could be hell on wheels. He was often hot-tempered and headstrong, but by the same token he was one of the most generous, considerate, and understanding people I have ever known. And yes, I am talking about the same charming fellow who once slammed the door in Joe Barbera's face.

To illustrate the point, I am going to tell a story so intensely personal that I was hesitant to put it down on paper. But since confession is supposed to be good for the soul . . .

During those years when we were promoting the annual Wintercon in Oklahoma City, the staff members took turns appearing on the local TV talk shows. At one time or another I did them all, some more than once. In 1977, a few days before I met Alex Toth, I made the first of several guest appearances on an afternoon kiddie show called *Ho Ho the Clown*. Snicker now, if you must. A gentle and soft-spoken man by the name of Ed Birchall played Ho Ho on local TV

for over 25 years. The thing I remember most about him is that he actually cared about the children who watched his show and the adults they would become. I think even his most ardent critics admired him for that.

The philosophers tell us that there are moments in every life that can change a person for all time. As odd as it might sound, appearing that first time on *Ho Ho* was just such a life-changing experience for me. I suppose it might help if you understood what I had rattling around in my head in those days, masquerading as lucid thought. I was still in my "angry young man" phase, slightly punch-drunk from reading too much Ayn Rand and Mickey Spillane. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was so opinionated on some topics that people found me threatening. I had recently become involved in local politics and had gone so far as to contemplate running for public office as a Republican. It gives me a cold chill now just to think about it.

At least by contemporary standards, *Ho Ho the Clown* had a very low level of sophistication. To illustrate the point, Birchall's cohost was a sock puppet named Pokey. The fellow who played the part (Bill Howard) never showed his face on camera. He would crouch down on a little stool and all the TV audience could see was his hand sticking up above the podium, covered with a bright green sock decorated to look like a puppet. Howard was an inveterate pipe smoker, and while the show was being filmed he puffed away on his pipe. Of course, no one could see him, but if a viewer were to look close enough he might see an occasional cloud of smoke coming from behind the podium.

While we were on a commercial break, I asked Howard if it was uncomfortable sitting in that awkward position. He just laughed and said, "It sure is, but for the money they pay me, it's worth it." He was actually the stage manager at KOCO-TV and probably didn't make an extra dime for appearing on the show. He reminded me a little of the Lou Grant character Ed Asner played on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Howard seemed like a nice guy, but I understood he could be a real tough cookie when he had to be. I think anyone who has ever been in a management position can relate to that.

I have only a vague recollection of what Birchall and I talked about that afternoon. I remember him giving a little pep talk on behalf of some civic organization encouraging children to visit their local public library. Then we did a little skit together that involved shooting plastic darts at balloons pasted to a bulletin board a few feet away. Toward the end of the show we finally got around to talking about the upcoming Wintercon. Birchall went out of his way to give the con a nice plug. Even Pokey got in on the act, inviting the television audience to join us at the con for a weekend of fun and frolic.

About then I happened to glance over at the TV monitor. I could see myself having this heart-to-heart talk with a clown and a sock puppet. Lord only knows how many thousands of people would see it. If I wasn't blushing, I probably should have been. At that exact moment I didn't understand the change that was coming over me; but the absurdity of the situation made it impossible for me to think about it and keep a straight face. It was as if I had been struck by a thunderbolt cast down from Mt. Olympus. It suddenly dawned on me that I had been taking myself (and life in general) far too seriously. I decided then and there that it was time for a major lifestyle change, beginning with an attitude adjustment. I have never regretted it for an instant.

A few days later, when Toth and I were having a drink together in the hotel bar, I told him about my recent experience on the *Ho Ho* show. If I had I been completely sober I might not have mentioned it. As it was, I kind of expected Toth to tell me that I had to be demented to even entertain such thoughts. Much to my surprise he just nodded his head in silent approval and took another sip of his drink. It was as if he completely understood where I was coming from. Then he said, "Hang on to that thought, kid. It's a damn good one."

Considering that even my wife didn't seem to understand the change that had come over me, it was nice to know at least one person did. For this reason, no one will ever convince me that Toth was half as ornery as some would have you believe. All I can say is that he was my friend; and I guess that says it all.

Here it is now some 35 years after the fact. Every time I stop to think about it, I realize there is no telling what direction my life might have gone had I not met Alex Toth. I might never have published comics books or met anyone who worked at Charlton or written this article. But I consider myself blessed. I certainly could have done a whole lot worse.

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Editor's Notes ***Readers' Letters***

Michael Ambrose, *Editor*

Charlton Spotlight (formerly ***Surf 'n' Squad Heroes***) Vol. 1, No. 8 • Halloween 2013
"Charlton Spotlight Gives You More!"

NICOLA CUTI is known generally as the nicest man in comics. That alone would secure the man's reputation, but Nick has accomplished far more in his long career. As right-hand man to Charlton Comics editor **George Wildman** from 1972 to 1975, Nick was personally responsible for producing almost a thousand comic books during that company's greatest period of expansion. He wrote hundreds of stories drawn by just about every regular Charlton artist. Along the way he co-created with **Joe Staton** the immortal **E-Man**, a character still going strong more than four decades after its first appearance.

After Charlton, Nick wrote and edited for all the major comics companies, had a career in Hollywood animation, and produced several live-action short films in the pulp SF tradition he so well loves, the latest being the newly released ***Moonie and the Spider Queen: Episode One***. Quite simply, the man won't quit. We were lucky to have him sit down and talk to this magazine for his first full-length interview in over a decade. Thanks to Dapper **Donnie Pitchford** for making the interview a reality.

Of course, Nick has been a steady contributor to this magazine since its earliest issues. Starting with #4 he revived for us his ***Weirdlings*** (now ***Weird Kids***) cartoon panel feature, which had some 40 appearances in Charlton ghost comics from 1972 to 1974. We've now published an additional 20. Nick and Joe starred in #6 with new **E-Man** and **Michael Mauser** stories. We continue the tradition of new Cuti comics work with his script for **Tom Sutton's** lost ***Doomsday+1*** story. What's next? Look for Nick and Joe's ***Mastermind***, coming sooner or later from ***Charlton Spotlight!***

TOM SUTTON. Charlton's ***Doomsday+1***, the post-apocalpytic adventure-SF title created by veteran writer **Joe Gill** and newbie artist **John Byrne**, originally ran for six issues, July 1975 to June 1976. Post-Charlton-implosion, the series was reprinted from #7 (June 1978) to #12 (May 1979). Early sales results were strong enough for management to consider continuing with new material. Editor **George Wildman** turned to the ever-reliable **Tom Sutton**, commissioning him to write and draw a new story and cover for #13, to be cover-dated July 1979. But as reported in ***The Comic Reader*** #166 (Mar. 1979), later sales figures were disappointing, and Charlton executives axed the series, leaving Tom's new material in limbo.

A little over a decade ago the original art—15 pages plus cover—for the completed but never-published story turned up on eBay, and I won the auction. I talked to Tom in March 2002, two months before he died, about the art. He had turned in the job and been paid for it and then forgot about it. The art and script languished in the Charlton files for years, to be "liberated" eventually by some Charlton employee. The art was finished, but all that remained of Tom's script by then were numbered balloons and captions on tracing-paper overlays, keyed to the lost script. It was an astonishing find and a real joy to read; Tom was such a strong storyteller that, despite the missing script, you could easily still get the sense of the story. I published the cover and splash page in the gallery section of ***Charlton Spotlight*** #6, but that was just a teaser. It would be a grand thing, I thought, to someday publish the entire story so the rest of the world could enjoy it. But how to do so as more than a mere curiosity?

To be done properly, it had to have the involvement of original Charlton creative folks and be printed in full color. When I thought about a writer to recreate the script from the finished art, there was really only one logical choice: **Nick Cuti** readily agreed to the job and quickly returned a finished script. For lettering, again the only logical choice was **Bill Pearson**, who had earlier lettered the recreated **E-Man** story, "Future Tense," for ***Spotlight*** #6. For coloring I turned to friend and ace cartoonist **Donnie Pitchford**. Donnie's a long-time friend of both Nick and Bill and was **George Wildman's** first fan, which surely must qualify him for honorary Charlton personnel status; besides, **Wendy Fiore** wasn't available. I hope you all enjoy reading "The Secret City," presented here complete and finished for the first time anywhere, and only 34 years late!

GEORGE WILDMAN is famous for his "Hidden Pictures" puzzle page in ***Highlights*** magazine. Ever since we finally got George into ***Spotlight*** beginning with his long feature interview in #7, I've been wanting to keep Charlton's last and greatest comics editor in the lineup. George generously created a special Charlton version of his trademark hidden-objects puzzle for this issue. Special thanks to George's talent-heavy son **Karl Wildman** for supplying the technical expertise needed to bring the puzzle to our pages. Share this fun page with your kids, young and old!

PAUL KUPPERBERG'S full memoir of his Charlton days finally appears in these pages after a long delay. Paul originally submitted it after he discovered ***Spotlight*** #6, but when it came time to put #7 together I found I had room only for an excerpt focusing on the late, great **Dick Giordano**. It's a real pleasure at last to present Paul's full article now. We can only imagine what Paul might have contributed to Charlton Comics if the company had kept going.

RON FRANTZ has been a mainstay of this magazine since the beginning. His Charlton memories are an integral part of our ongoing mission: exploring the history of the Charlton Comics Group. Alex Toth's intersection with Charlton was quite minimal—a mere handful of stories and covers, from early in his career (a "Little Laffs" filler in ***Yellowjacket*** #7, Jan. 1946; a couple stories in ***Scotland Yard*** #1, June 1955) to later (a story in ***My Only Love*** #3, Nov. 1975; a couple covers for ***Real West***, Dec. 1972 and Apr. 1973) and, on the semipro side, a "Question" story in CPL/Gang"s ***Charlton Bullseye*** #5 (July-Sept. 1976). Yet Toth's influence on anybody who ever drew comics, including those who toiled at Charlton, is inarguable, and he counted many Charlton artists as personal friends. I think we can all agree that Ron's column this time around is his best yet.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

NICOLA CUTI is a writer, artist and filmmaker living on the Florida Gulf coast. He has written and edited comics for Warren, Charlton, Marvel, DC and many others and is best known as the cocreator, with Joe Staton, of **E-Man**. Nick spent 16 years in Hollywood animation as a background designer on such projects as *Gargoyles*, *Defenders of the Earth*, *Exo-Squad* and *101 Dalmatians*. Nick's latest project is indie film ***Moonie and the Spider Queen***, available from Amazon. Contact Nick at **space.opera@yahoo.com**.

RON FRANTZ's Charlton memories appear here regularly. Ron is the author of ***FAN-DOM: Confidential***, a critically acclaimed historical documentary of fandom (*see ad in Ron's article*). Currently he is relaunching, with artist **Mort Todd**, his original **ACE Comics** line. Contact Ron at **Magilla445@aol.com**.

PAUL KUPPERBERG made his first professional story sale to Charlton in 1975, a tale illustrated by Mike Zeck for ***Scary Tales*** #3. Paul went on to write hundreds of comics, primarily for DC, where he was also an editor. He is the author of ***Kevin*** (Grossett & Dunlap), a YA novel starring Archie Comics' first gay character, as well as ***The Same Old Story***, a comic book–themed mystery novel, and cocreator and contributor to the shared universe anthology series ***ReDeus*** (both available at **CrazySPress.com**). You can follow Paul at **PaulKupperberg.com**.

BILL PEARSON was Charlton Comics assistant editor from 1975 to 1982 and has written and edited comics for several other companies. He is the editor/publisher of ***witzend***, soon to be published as a two-volume hardcover slipcased facsimile edition by Fantagraphics Books. Contact Bill via **www.witzend13.com**.

DONNIE PITCHFORD is a retired educator-broadcaster living in Carthage, Texas. After his 1983–2010 career in education, Pitchford returned to his first love—comics! He is currently producing the weekly ***Lum and Abner***® comic strip and audio feature, available at **www.lumandabnersociety.org** and **www.gocomics.com/lum-and-abner**. Based on the 1931–54 Old Time Radio comedy classic, the new comic strips include audio adaptations complete with character voices, sound effects and music. Donnie is a member of the Southeast Chapter of the National Cartoonists Society. Contact him at **donniepitchford@sbcglobal.net**.

TOM SUTTON was one of Charlton Comics' star artist-writers from 1972 to the company's implosion in 1976, producing highly original and memorable covers and stories for Charlton's weird, war and romance titles. See ***Charlton Spotlight*** #3 for a fuller treatment of Tom's life and work.

GEORGE WILDMAN began his Charlton career in 1969 drawing ***Popeye*** and succeeded Sal Gentile as editor of the comics line in 1971, hiring Nicola Cuti as assistant editor the following year. Post-Charlton, George has had a prolific career illustrating children's books and magazines; his "Hidden Pictures" are a mainstay in ***Highlights*** magazine. See ***Charlton Spotlight*** #7 for a fuller treatment of George's life and career, and contact him via **www.georgewildman.com** and **www.wildtoonz.com** (don't forget the "z"!).

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IN MEMORIAM

We sadly note the passing of the following Charlton Comics creators and staff.

JOE SIMON
Oct. 11, 1913–Dec. 14, 2011

JOHN SEVERIN
Dec. 26, 1921–Feb. 12, 2012

FRAN MATERA
Dec. 9, 1924–Mar. 16, 2012

BURTON N. LEVEY
Mar. 22, 1917–Sept. 26, 2012

MARC SWAYZE
July 17, 1913–Oct. 14, 2012

DAN ADKINS
Mar. 15, 1937–May 8, 2013

WE GET LETTERS!

JERRY BOYD

Each and every issue of *Charlton Spotlight* has been a delight. I treasure this terrific fanzine and I hope, despite the sad fact that so many Charlton creators have left us over the last two decades, that you'll be able to find/uncover "lost interviews" and get new material for issues to come. And that leads me to that nice chat with George Wildman and Hy Eisman. You learn something new every day (like the man said) and I never knew Hy Eisman (whom I interviewed for the *Harveyville Fun Times* 'zine a few years ago) had Charlton connections!

Ron Frantz's memoir of Dick Giordano was exceptional. This piece really got to me because of its candor. Many times fanzine contributors get caught up, consciously or not, into serving the notion that "all creators mentioned in my piece were top-notch at their jobs and great in their dealings with co-workers or employees." Artfully and diplomatically, Mr. Frantz relates Mr. Giordano's perspectives beautifully while maintaining complete credibility. This type of approach is to be applauded. Aside from that, the article was well written and a nice tribute to one of Charlton's and comicdom's best. In April of '13 I purchased *Ditkomania* #90 to get more of Ron's recollections re: Mr. Ditko and I wasn't disappointed.

Nice job, Mr. Ambrose—please keep it going.

—•—

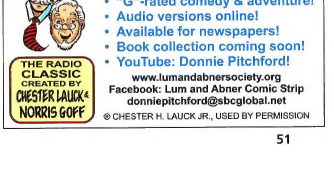
VAL MORISI

Thanks for the new *Charlton Spotlight*. I don't recall meeting George Wildman, but I remember my Dad having phone conversations with him. I did, however, correspond with Dick Giordano. In fact he partially explained the DCThunderbelt deal and put me in touch with Paul Levitz regarding the contract and the unpublished issue. I look forward to reading this issue, which by the way, is stunning in its appearance.

—•—

PETER SMITH

I really enjoyed *Spotlight* #7. I was bowled over, but since I expect to be bowled over by the *Spotlight*, I took it in stride. I received the issue by post late Thursday or Friday,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and wasn't able to get to it until Sunday evening, when I pulled an "all-nighter," spending several pleasant hours lost in Charlton land. I am always amazed at how your focus on Charlton comics incidentally reveals information about other comic book companies. Also, Dick Giordano was only a name to me, but anyone who is remembered by others as a decent human being always manages to impress me somehow. One thing about the issue that kept surprising me—though perhaps it shouldn't have—was how when it took me back into nostalgia it opened up histories about which I knew nothing. Another point was how impressed I was by the way you always manage to use the same old theme to present the reader something entirely new, issue after issue. I confess that partway through I felt envy at your solid body of work, for which I sincerely congratulate you. I look forward with delight to envying you even more in the future!

—•—

PIERS CASIMIR
www.spookyfanzine.com

No. 7 was . . . wow! I loved the cover, and the George Wildman interview was enticing and very revealing. The 2-pager on Dick Giordano was a fitting memory to a great man. Ron Frantz's "Remembering Dick Giordano" was superb. A real insight by someone who worked with him. I admire Giordano for his Charlton work and what he achieved at DC. A great loss of a man. May he Rest in Peace. I learnt much and it was a fitting and honest tribute to a great man. It was a brilliant issue, and a superb historical record of times gone by. Thank you.

—•—

BILL SCHELLY

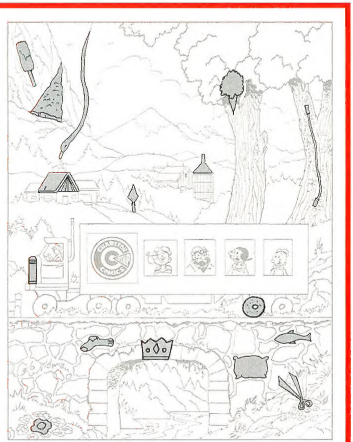
A new issue of *CS* was something I really didn't expect. However, it was most welcome, as I've enjoyed all the prior issues, and you do a superb job of finding material and putting it together. In this case, I actually enjoyed the material on Dick Giordano the most. While I appreciate George Wildman's role as longtime Charlton editor, my Charlton "golden age" and area of chief interest is Giordano's Action Hero line, and the ghost titles of the 1970s with all that wonderful Ditko artwork.

When I got back into buying and reading comics in 1985 after a 12-year hiatus, Giordano was editor in chief at DC. I remember being surprised and pleased he had reached that lofty position. I enjoyed a lot of the comics produced during that time. When I began attending the San Diego Comicon in 1991, I got to meet Dick briefly, while he was signing at the DC booth, and could tell right away that he hadn't suffered from an inflated ego. This impression was confirmed over ensuing years; he was always very nice, very welcoming and super-friendly. I never dreamed I'd have the chance to collaborate with Dick, but in 1999 I had a chance to do just that. I was producing a comic book one-shot called *Heroes vs. Hitler*, which featured the return of six of the most popular amateur heroes from the fanzines of the 1960s in a long team story. (Among them were Grass Green's Human Cat, Biljo White's The Eye, and Ronn Foss's Eclipse.) I had aspired as a teenager to draw comics professionally, but never had the burning desire—or perhaps the talent—to make it happen. *Heroes vs. Hitler* was to be my belated attempt to do the very best comic strip that I was capable of, just to see what I could do if I really applied myself. So, with a little help from Roy Thomas, I wrote and penciled a 33-page story which turned out quite well. I paid Bill Black (of AC Comics) to ink my pencils, and he did a fine job. But I thought it would be really cool to have one of my inking idols go over my pencils on the cover and a centerfold pin-up that would be printed in color.

One choice could have been Joe Sinnott, but Joe was moving at the time and it wasn't feasible. Then I thought of Dick. Somehow I'd heard that Dick was doing freelance work and commissions, so I thought, "Why not try?" The problem was that the budget for the comic really only allowed me to offer $75 to him for each of the two pages. I contacted him and, acknowledging that this was less than his going rate (which I think was about $125 at the time), asked him if he would consider inking them for that price. I was a little surprised that Dick readily agreed, and asked me to send them. I wasted no time doing that.

The package came back from Dick quickly. Words aren't sufficient to convey the thrill I felt as I opened it and carefully pulled out the two pages with Giordano's fantastic inking. I had worked pretty hard on the penciling, certainly, but what he did with the inks made them look so much better! And he didn't "correct" my work; he simply knew how to bring out the best in it. As a result, I had an experience as close to working in pro comics as I would ever have. This really was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream for me, and Dick made it happen. And, as a bit of a footnote, *Heroes vs. Hitler* turned out to be the best selling publication I ever did with my Hamster Press company. Was it because of Dick's inks? Well, they were probably a big part of it, because that cover was reproduced in full in the ads in Diamond *Previews*. And the response from readers was very gratifying, even though I knew in my heart of hearts that my pencils weren't really up to pro standards. But that was OK because it was a great experience, and because I got to collaborate with one of my heroes in the comics field, Dick Giordano.

—•—



Answers to **George Wildman's** "Hidden Objects" puzzle on page 32.

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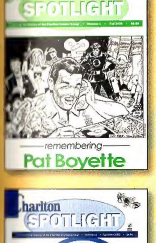

Charlton Spotlight #1
(Fall 2000)
Pat Boyette tribute
Celebrating the life & art of a Charlton legend, with memoirs & commentary by Joe Gill, Steve Skeates, Alex Toth, Bill Pearson, Jim Amash, Ron Frantz, Don Manguss, & others • biography, bibliography, & comprehensive checklist of Boyette's work in comics & film • Boyette cover gallery • complete Charlton Comics title checklist • front cover by Tom Sutton • back cover by Jim Amash • 48 pages, $6.95 • **ALMOST SOLD OUT, ORDER NOW!**

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Remembering the life & art of one of comics' great stylists, featuring memoirs & commentary by Steve Skeates, Nicola Cuti, Bill Pearson, Batton Lash, Jim Amash, Bhob Stewart, Steve Fiorilla, & Stefan Petrucha • unpublished photos & art • Sutton interview by Mark Burbey • Sutton Charlton checklist, cover gallery, & classic reprint • Jose Delbo & Henry Scarpelli interviews • Pete Morisi, Jack Keller, & Grass Green spotlights • Charlton yearly checklist, part 2 • covers by Tom Sutton • 72 pages, $7.95

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(Fall 2005)
Pete Morisi tribute
Celebrating the life & art of "PAM," the enigmatic creator of Johnny Dynamite & Thunderbolt, with memoirs & commentary by Steve Skeates, Bill Pearson, Mark Burbey, Glen Johnson, Ron Frantz, & others • unpublished photos & art • interview with Steve Morisi • PAM Charlton checklist, cover gallery, & classic reprint • Charlton monster-mag memories by Tom Christopher, with unpublished art • Nicola Cuti's Weirdlings • Charlton yearly checklist, part 3 • covers by Pete Morisi • 76 pages, $7.95

Charlton Spotlight #5
(Fall 2006)
Joe Gill & Steve Ditko
Legendary Joe Gill tells all in 24-page interview with Jim Amash, featuring unpublished photos & art • action-heroes Captain Atom, Blue Beetle & The Question examined • rare 1950s Ditko story reprint • Steve Skeates on working with Ditko & Aparo • the overlooked Charlton text stories • we visit Charlton in 1973 • Nicola Cuti's Weirdlings • Charlton yearly checklist, part 4 • front cover by Nicola Cuti • classic comic back cover by Steve Ditko • 80 pages, $7.95

Charlton Spotlight #6
(Fall 2008)
All art & comics
Full-length, vintage, unpublished E-Man & Michael Mauser stories by Nicola Cuti & Joe Staton • Charlton Gallery: unpublished & rare art, artifacts & photos featuring Ditko, Sutton, Giordano, Newton, Boyette, Fraccio, Tallarico, Wildman, Gentile, Gill, Masulli, Santangelo, Gibson, & more • Nicola Cuti's Weird Kids • Charlton yearly checklist, part 5 • front cover by Joe Staton • unpublished back cover by Pat Boyette • 68 pages, $7.95

Charlton Spotlight #7
(Winter-Spring 2011-12)
George Wildman & Dick Giordano
Interview with George Wildman • Paul Kupperberg and Ron Frantz remember the late, great Dick Giordano • Nicola Cuti's Weird Kids • Charlton yearly checklist, part 6 • front cover by Donnie Pitchford • back cover montage of Dick Giordano Charlton covers • full color throughout • 40 pages, $7.95

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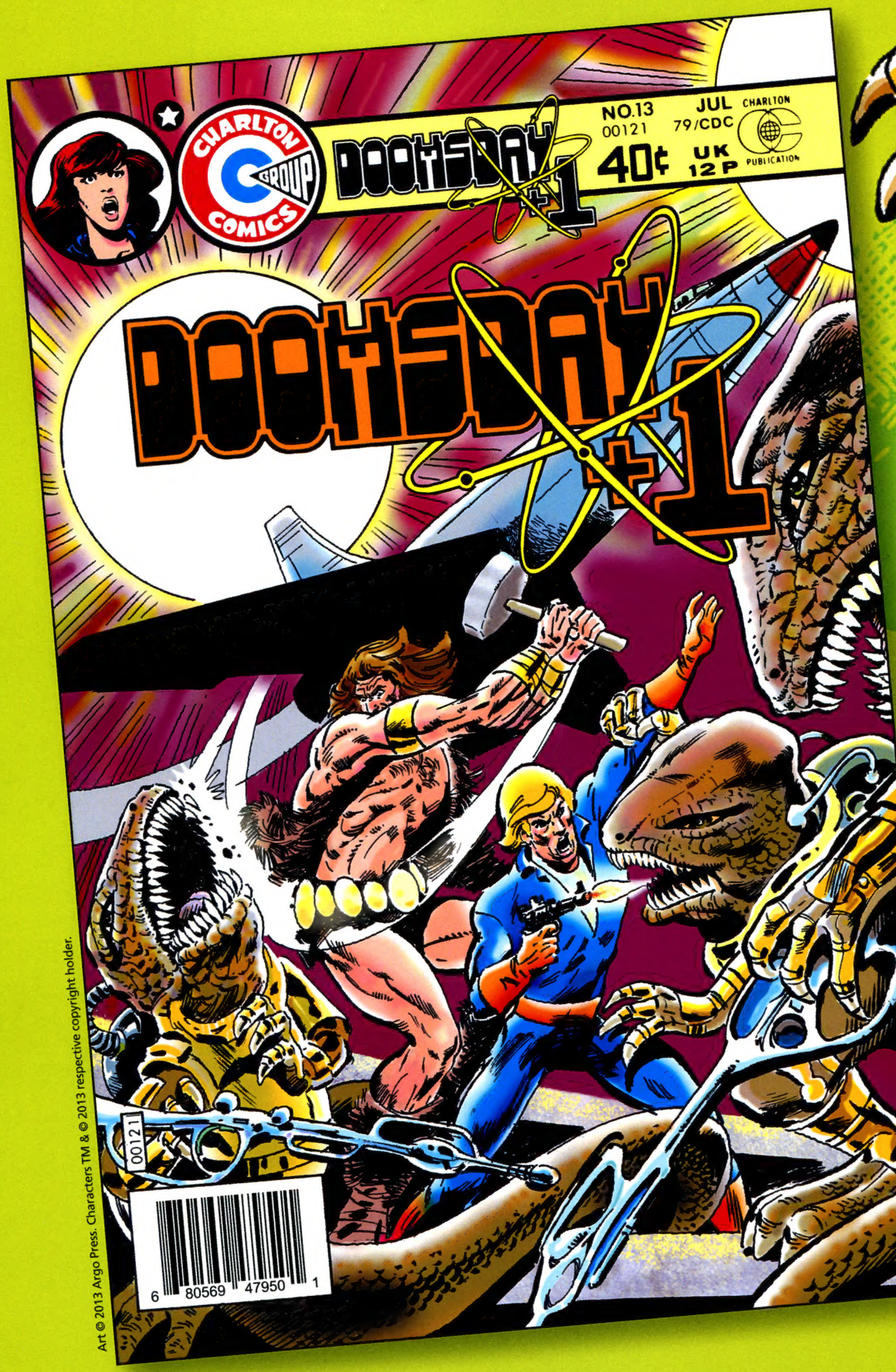

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